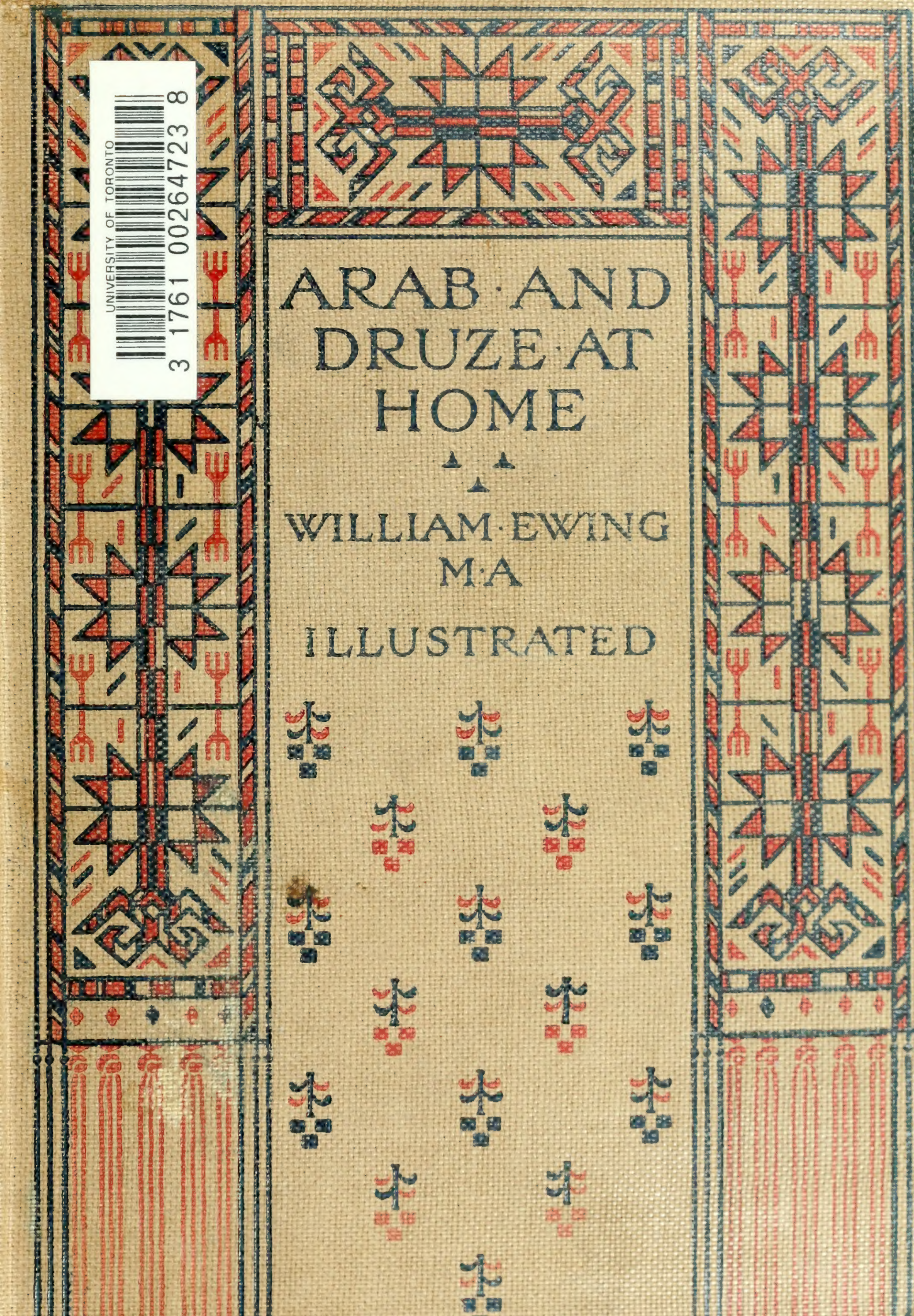


ARAB · AND
DRUZE · AT
HOME
WILLIAM · EWING
M · A
ILLUSTRATED

Who else you know you might ...?

Acting for fun?

What about Scarlet? Did you like it?

Why leave?

Why English now?

Where are you gonna go next?

Bessie.

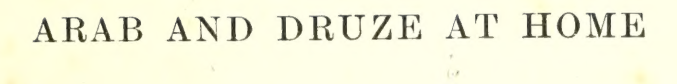
Her friends who are married seem to be ... ging me

Why were? How meet?

Why was the whole cast shaved up at

For you to ... cast party?

[illegible]



ARAB AND DRUZE AT HOME





ARAB SHEIKH

(Photo. The Photochrome Co. Ld.)

ARAB AND DRUZE AT HOME

A RECORD OF TRAVEL
AND INTERCOURSE WITH THE PEOPLES
EAST OF THE JORDAN

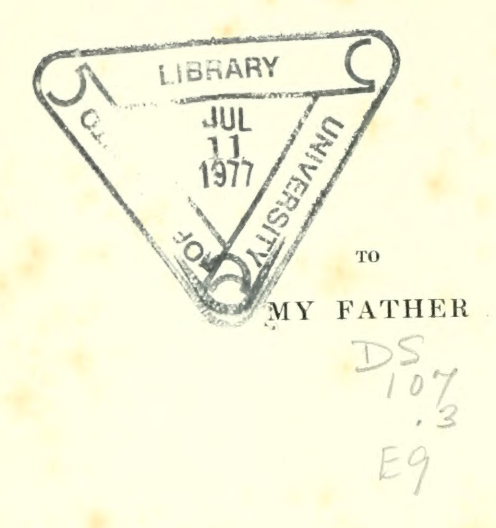
BY

WILLIAM EWING, M.A.

FIVE YEARS RESIDENT AT TIBERIAS

THIRTY-ONE ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAP

LONDON: T. C. & E. C. JACK
16 HENRIETTA STREET W.C.
AND EDINBURGH
1907



TO

MY FATHER



TIBERIAS FROM THE SEA

FOREWORD

THE number of books published regarding Palestine proves the exhaustless fascination of the subject. Most of them, however, deal with Western Palestine; and even of this, beyond the districts traversed by the annual stream of tourists, comparatively little is heard.

The lands beyond the Jordan are seldom visited. For the ordinary sight-seer the difficulties and dangers are considerable; but these almost entirely vanish before one who can speak the language and is able to mingle freely with the people.

This book is an attempt to lift a little way the veil which still so largely obscures that region, in spite of its great and splendid history; where picturesque and beautiful scenery, the crumbling memorials of grey antiquity, and the life of villager and nomad to-day, cast a mysterious spell upon the spirit.

While the information given in the following pages is woven round the narrative of a single journey, it is the outcome of frequent travel and familiar intercourse with the peoples both east and west of Jordan.

During a residence of over five years in Palestine the writer was privileged often, quite alone or with a single native attendant, to visit the peasantry and the *Beduw*, to share the shelter of mud hut and goat's-hair tent, to enjoy their abounding hospitality and friendly converse in the *medāfy*, on the house-top, and around the camp-fire in the wilderness.

What is here related regarding these strange but deeply interesting peoples was either learned from their own lips or verified in converse with them.

The author offers his tribute of affection and gratitude to the memory of Dr. H. Clay Trumbull of Philadelphia, U.S.A., surely the most generous and friendly of editors, who first moved him to write on Oriental subjects.

For many of the photographs taken on the journey he is indebted to his companions in travel, Rev. J. Calder Macphail, D.D., Edinburgh, and Dr. Mackinnon of Damascus; for others, to Dr. Paterson of Hebron and to the Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund. He also gratefully acknowledges assistance received from the Rev. J. E. H. Thomson, D.D., and Oliphant Smeaton, Esq., M.A., F.S.A., Edinburgh.

EDINBURGH, *December* 1906.



DAMASCUS FROM MINARET OF GREAT MOSQUE

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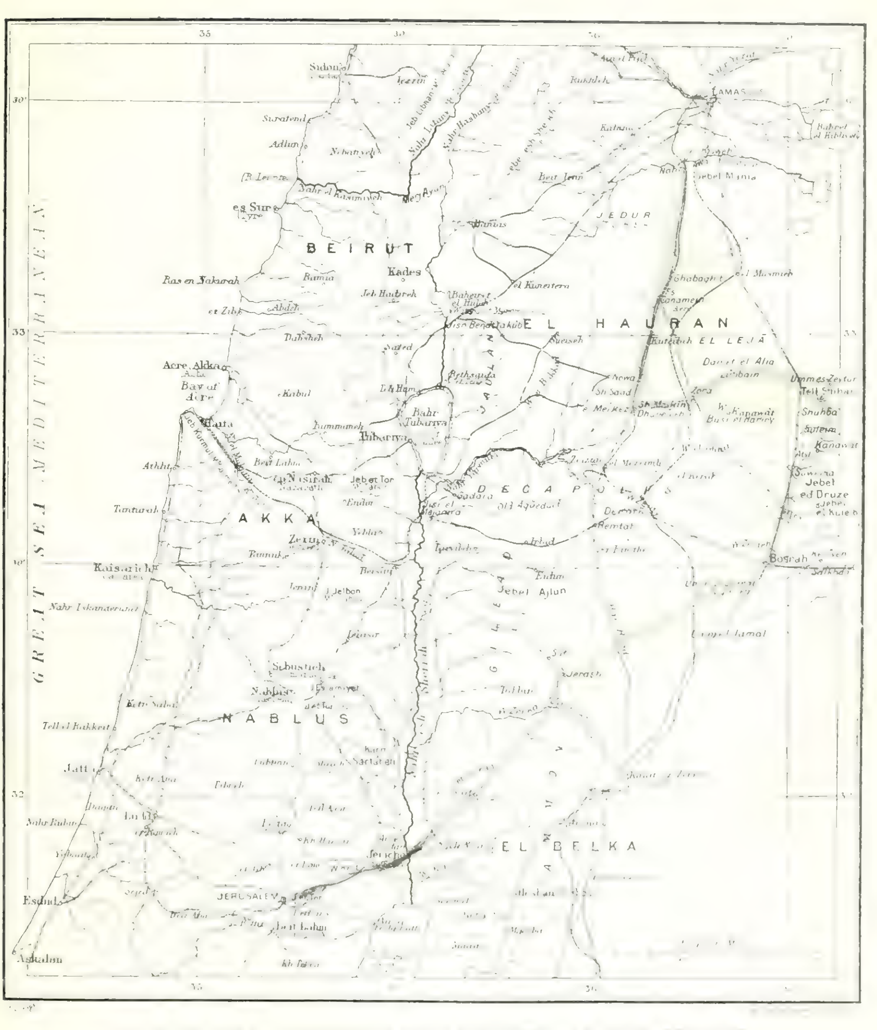
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MAP OF THE COUNTRY EAST AND WEST OF THE JORDAN

CHAPTER I

Damascus—Haurân Railway—Great Moslem pilgrimage—The plains of Damascus — Great Hermon — *El-Kisweh* — Bridges in Palestine — *Ghabâghib*—*Es-Sanamein*—Medical myth—A Land of Fear—Grain-fields of *Haurân*—An oppressed peasantry—*Nowa.*

THERE is a pleasant excitement in the prospect of a journey through long-forgotten lands, where hoary age is written on dark ruin and carved stone, which lends its influence to while away the monotonous days of preparation. But even amid surroundings of entrancing interest in the queenly city on the *Barada*, the traveller soon grows impatient to find himself in the saddle with his friends, heading away towards the hills that bound the green plains of Damascus. Fortunately, we could dispense with a dragoman, often more an imperious master than an obliging servant, and were able to arrange our routes and carry out our programme according to our own wishes.

Leaving the city by *Bawabbat Ullah*, we took the *Hajj* road to the south-west. This for many centuries was, what in the southern reaches it still is, a mere track, not always clear, and often to be kept only by

observance of landmarks. To facilitate the passage of troops to and from *Haurân*, the Government had made a fairly good road from Damascus to some distance within that province. A railway has now been built, and is in working order as far south as *Mizerîb.* One day, perhaps, it will reach the sacred cities in *el-Hejaz.* If this do not greatly expedite the *hâjj's* enterprise, it will at least add variety to his peril. The first trains east of the Jordan were objects of surpassing interest to the camels. Unaccustomed to give way to anything else on the road, a strange mingling of curiosity and pride brought many of these "ships of the desert" to grief.

Our journey fell in the late spring of 1890. The *Hajj*, the great annual pilgrimage to *Mecca* and *Medîna*, fell that year in the month of April. A few days before we started, we had seen the pilgrims and their guard setting out. Most were mounted on mules, but there were also a few horses and camels. Conspicuous among these last was that which bore the *Mahmal* — the canopy in which is carried the Sultan's gift—a covering for the shrine at *Mecca*. The canopy is of green silk, richly embroidered, supported by silver posts. On its apex a gilt crescent and globe flash in the bright sun. The occasion stirs the city to its depths. The roofs all along the line of route were crowded, and every point of vantage was occupied by eager spectators. The procession passed amid the hum of suppressed conversation. From the faces in the crowd it was plain to see that many had gone of whose return there was but little hope. The



MOSLEM PILGRIMAGE LEAVING DAMASCUS

weary, painful journey through the pitiless desert, beset by marauding Arabs, and the insanitary conditions of the "holy places," prepare a sure path for not a few to *Firdaus*—"the garden" *par excellence* of Moslem dreams, the unfailing portion of him who dies on pilgrimage. The stir caused by their passage through the country quickly subsides. When we followed in their footsteps, things had already assumed their drowsy normal.

Passing the gates, we were at once in the open country; for the famous orchards do not extend thus far in this direction. On every side the plains were clad with heavy crops of waving green; the whir of the quail and the crack of the sportsman's fowling-piece mingled with the frequent sound of running waters—sweetest music to the Syrian ear. Stately camels came swinging along, each with a great millstone balanced on his back. One of these forms a camel-load. The basaltic quarries in the mountains southward, from which these stones, celebrated for hardness and durability, are hewn, have been long and widely esteemed. Full thirty miles away, yet, in the clear April afternoon, seeming almost on the edge of the nearer plain, lay the magnificent mass of Hermon, clad in his garment of shining white—a huge snowy bank against the horizon, twenty miles long and ten thousand feet high. Those who have seen this majestic gleaming height, when the snows lie deep in the early year, can understand how appropriately the Amorites named it *Senir*—the breastplate, or shield. Syria owes much to Hermon.

Cool breezes blow from his cold steeps; his snows are carried now, as in ancient days, to moisten parched lip and throat in the streets of Sidon and Damascus. Many of the streams "that fill the vales with winding light" and living green are sweet daughters of the mighty mountain, while his refreshing dews descend, as sang the Psalmist, even on the distant and lowly Zion.

Looking back a moment from the rising ground, ere passing down behind the Black Mountain, we caught a parting glimpse of the fair city, renowned in Arab song and story. Rich flats now stretched between us and the thick embowering orchards, over which rose tall minaret and glistening dome. A light haze hung over the city, obscuring the immediate background; but away beyond appeared the high shoulders and peaks of Anti-Lebanon, many capped with helmets of snow, standing like guards around the birthplace of the city's life; for thence comes the Abana, the modern *Barada*, without which there could have been no Damascus.

A gentle descent brings us to the *A'waj*, in which many find the Bible Pharpar—a name still to be traced, perhaps, in *Wady Barbar*, higher up but not a tributary of this stream. On the nearer bank stands *el-Kisweh*, a Moslem village of some pretensions, with khan mosque and minaret, and ancient castle, while the stream is spanned by an old-time bridge. No new bridges in Palestine are of any account. The only two that span the Jordan from *Banias* to the Dead Sea—the *Jisr Benât Ya'kûb*, below the waters of

Merom, and *Jisr el-Mejami'a* above Bethshan—are both survivors of the old Roman system. Around and below *el-Kisweh*, as in all places where water comes to bless the toil of the husbandman, are beautiful orchards; olive and willow, fig, apricot, and pomegranate mingle their foliage in rich profusion; and high over all rise the stately cypress trees—the spires and minarets of the grove. Here, when the *Hajj* falls in summer or autumn, pilgrims take leave of greenness and beauty, and press forward on their long desert march to the *Haramein*. As our evening song of praise rose from the river's bank, for centuries accustomed to hear only the muttered devotions of the Moslem, we could not but think of the time when the voice of psalms shall roll with the sweet waters down the vale—a time surely not far distant now; and in the thought we found new inspiration for our work.

Continuing southward, a dark mountain lies to the left, well named *Jebel Māni'a*, which may be rendered "Mount of Protection," or "The Protector." In its difficult recesses the peasant cultivators of the rich open land around find a home, secure against marauding *Beduw* and lawless bands. *Jedûr*, the old Iturea, stretches away to the right; we are now in *Haurân*, part of the land of Bashan, corresponding in name to the ancient Auranitis. At *Ghabâghib*, where we halt for lunch, great cisterns and scattered ruins tell of an important place in times past. It has fallen on evil days, only a few wretched hovels occupying the site. The poor inhabitants, demoralised by

the yearly *Hajj*, expect much more than value for anything they supply; but neither here nor anywhere east of Jordan did we once hear the irritating cry *Bakhshîsh*.

From this point the road deteriorates. First there are patches of some thirty yards in length thickly laid with broken stones, then occasional stretches of ground cleared, and finally the ancient track, with no claim to be called a road. These patches illustrate the Government method of road-building. All is done by forced labour. A certain length of road is allocated to each town or village in the district concerned, and this the inhabitants are bound to construct themselves, or pay for its construction. The stone-laid patches represent the diligence and promptitude of some villages; the intervals suggest the evasions of work, in the practice of which the Arab is an adept.

The country now becomes more open. The view stretches far in front over the waving grain-fields which have given *Haurân* its fame. Westward, the rolling downs of *Jaulan*, the New Testament Gaulanitis, corresponding to the ancient Golan, reach away towards the roots of Hermon, with their beautiful conical hills, once grim smoking volcanoes, now grass-covered to the top; while beyond Jordan we catch glimpses of the Safed hills. To the left, at a somewhat lower level, through a light mist we see indistinctly the dark lava-fields of *el-Lejâ'*, and dim on the eastern horizon rises the mountain-range *Jebel ed-Druze*.

Es-Sanamein, "the two idols," where we spent the Sunday, stands to the west of the *Hajj* road. This is a typical *Haurân* village. The houses are built throughout of basalt, the oldest having no mortar whatever—doors, window-shutters, and roofs all of the same durable material. They have outlived the storms of many centuries, and, if left alone, might see millenniums yet. The modern houses are built from the ruins, the mortar being mud. Carved and inscribed stones that once adorned temple or public building may often be seen, usually upside down, in these rickety new structures. Many houses are fairly underground, being literally covered with rubbish, accumulated through the long years, as generation after generation grew up within these walls and passed away. One temple, built also of basalt, is well preserved, the ornamentation on pillar, niche, and lintel being finer than most to be seen in *Haurân.* A Greek inscription[1] tells us that this temple was dedicated to Fortuna. An olive-press occupies the centre of the temple. Near by a large water-tank is connected by channels still traceable with an elaborate system of baths. The ancients loved these more than do their degenerate successors. Several tall square towers are evidently of some antiquity; but awkwardly placed hewn stones, certainly taken from other buildings, show them to be modern compared with the city whose ruins lie around.

The doctor's name is a passport to favour all over

[1] For inscriptions copied here and in other places on a later journey, see *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly* for 1895.

the land: Christian, Moslem, and Druze, however fanatical, have ever a welcome for him. His presence brought a perpetual stream of afflicted ones. The people are in many respects simple and primitive. Myth and mystery grow and flourish among them. Most extraordinary tales are told, and accepted with unquestioning faith. The traveller who goes thither leaves modern times behind, sails far up the dark stream of time, and lives again in the dim days of long ago.

Grateful patients sang the doctor's praise and celebrated his skill. From lip to lip the story and the wonder grew. Some with sore eyes had been relieved. By and by we heard that a great doctor had passed through the country, who took out people's eyes, opened them up, washed them thoroughly, and replaced them in their sockets, when the aged and weak-eyed saw again with the brightness of youth!

These lands offer a tempting and promising field for the medical missionary. His profession would act like magic in securing entrance to the people's homes and confidence. And it is practically virgin soil. He would build on no other man's foundation.

About sunset the owner of a flock from whom we wished to buy a lamb was brought to our tents. The flock was sheltered only a little way from the village, but, as the shadows deepened, he displayed no little unwillingness to go thither. At last, armed with sword, musket, and pistols, and accompanied by one similarly accoutred, he sallied forth, not without signs of alarm. Soon he returned, the



THE COOK'S TENT

lamb under his arm, and looks of evident relief on his face. Neither fear nor relief was without reason. In that lawless land, he who goes abroad after sundown takes his life in his hand. Even the hardy shepherd, with tough, well-knit frame, fed on the milk of the flocks, exercised in the invigorating air of the uplands, used from infancy to face the dangers of the solitary wilderness by day, trembles until his knees knock together at the thought of falling into the hands of the enemy who lurks privily for him in the dark.

From *es-Sanamein* two tracks branch off, one to the east, the other to the west of the *Hajj* road. The former leads down to the villages on the borders of *el-Lejâ'*; the latter to *Nowa, Sheikh Sa'ad,* and *el-Merkez,* the last being the seat of the Governor of *Haurân,* who is also military commander in the province. The main part of our company went eastward. Two of us turned towards *el-Merkez* to visit the Governor, who had been ordered by his superior in Damascus to show us what attention and kindness might be possible. Our arrangement was to meet at night by a city in the south-west corner of *el-Lejâ'*, whence we hoped to penetrate that forbidding region. We rode down a ruin-covered slope, on a paved road —monument of the wise old warrior Romans, and crossed, by an ancient bridge, the little brook which, fed by springs on the southern slopes of Hermon, affords a perennial supply of water. The bridge, having served men for centuries, now failing, is almost dangerous to horsemen. A few stones and a little

mortar judiciously applied would quite restore it. But where shall we find an Arab with public spirit enough to do that from which another might reap benefit?

Here we entered the far-famed grain-fields of *Haurân.* What magnificent stretches they are! These vast plains of waving green, here and there tending to yellow, were our wonder and delight for many days. Such land as this, with rich, dark soil, yielding royally, might well sustain a teeming population. Often, in the West, had I watched the interminable strings of camels, laden with wheat, on all the great caravan roads leading from the east to Acre, the principal seaport, and mused as to whence these well-nigh fabulous streams of golden grain should come—from what mysterious land of plenty. Now I could understand it all. As that scene opens to view, visions of the future inevitably rise—but even in fancy one cannot easily exhaust the possibilities enclosed in these generous plains. What it once was, as attested by grim ruins around—a land studded with beautiful cities and prosperous villages—that, at least, it may be again. We see what it is under the hand of the ignorant peasant, with antique methods and implements of husbandry. Who shall say what it might become with enlightened care? This is of special interest *now*, when the eyes of the world are turning toward Palestine to find a home for the descendants of the men to whom long since it was given by God. Far more of the land in western Palestine than appears to the passing

traveller would bear heavy crops of grain; while of the remainder, although much was probably never cultivated, there is very little which, in the hands of patient, industrious people, might not be made to yield fair returns. Evidence of the wealth and immense possibilities of the soil of Bashan meets one on every hand.

As the eye wanders over the wide green expanse, the thought naturally arises, whence the reapers are to come who shall gather in the harvest; for the population, as represented by the little villages seen at long intervals, is certainly quite inadequate to the task. Should the traveller return six weeks hence, he will find the whole country alive. Men and women, youths, maidens, and little children, come trooping up from the deep depression of the Jordan valley; reapers pour down in streams from the mountain glens. And right swiftly must they ply their task; for soon the burning suns and hot winds of the desert will drive the wild *Beduw* and their flocks hither in search of pasture and water, when woe betide the owner of unreaped or ungathered grain. The robber bands that afflicted the patriarch Job in these same fields, according to local tradition, have worthy successors to-day in the bold wanderers from the sandy wastes.

No scythe ever flashes among the bending heads of wheat and barley here. Everything is reaped with the hook—not changed in form, I should say, for at least three thousand years. Faithfully, too, is the law befriending the gleaners observed; and many a

golden armful is carried off at evening by modern Ruth, widow and orphan, to store in the clay vats that stand in the corners of their little houses, against the cheerless winter days. When the grain is cut, it is swiftly gathered into heaps on threshing-floors, in the neighbourhood of villages or other protected spots, ready for the "treading out," the process that still stands for threshing here.

Donkeys and camels are the carrying animals chiefly employed in the fields. They are constant companions everywhere, even in the desert, where the former has almost as good a claim to the honourable title "ship of the desert" as his better-known comrade. The grain is bound in bundles of equal weight, one of which is tied on either side, over a broad, wooden saddle. Seen in motion from a little distance, the animals are quite concealed: they seem like so many animated "stacks" making their way home. Reaping and gathering are soon accomplished, but threshing and winnowing are tedious. The most primitive methods are still employed. Round each heap the ground is covered about knee-deep with grain, and over this, round and round, oxen or horses are driven, trampling it under foot; or the old *tribulum*, a strong piece of board, with small stones fastened in its under surface, is drawn, until the straw is beaten small and the wheat or barley thoroughly separated. This is then drawn aside, and a second supply, taken from the grain-heap, treated in the same way. The process is repeated until all has been thus reduced. Winnowing is done only when there is sufficient wind

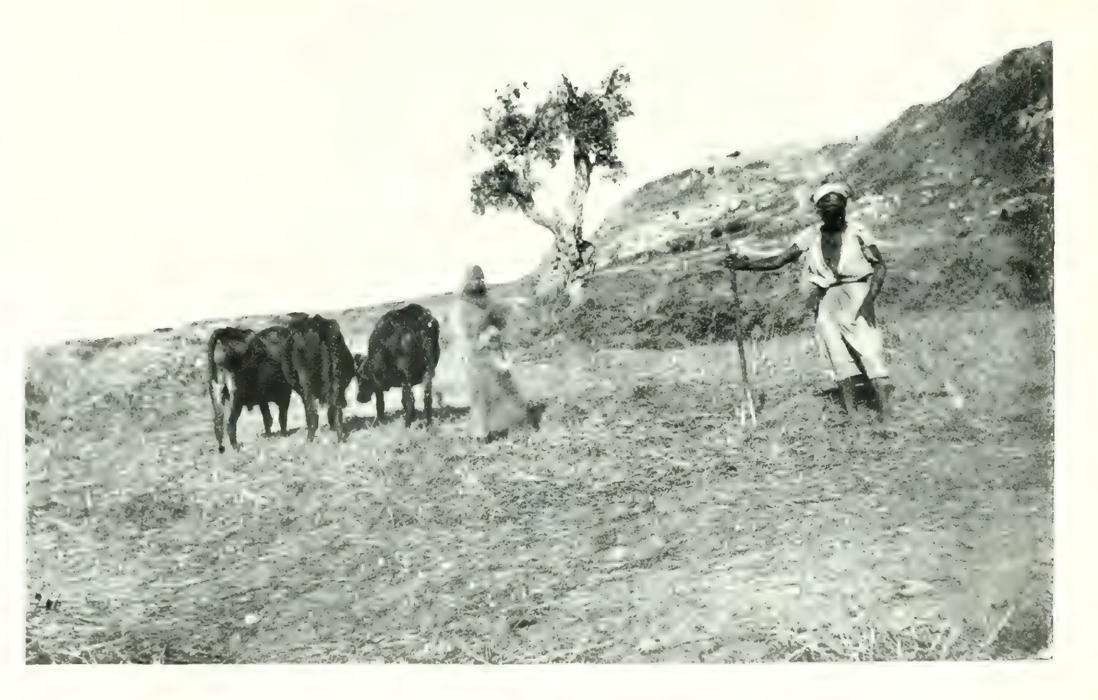
to "drive the chaff away." Then the new heap of threshed stuff is attacked with a wooden fork of three prongs and tossed high in the air. The grain falls at once, forming a heap beside the workman, while the chaff or crushed straw is blown into a bank farther off. This may be repeated several times, until the wheat or barley is quite clean. Then it is put into goats'-hair sacks, ready for transport, since only a fraction of what the land produces is used in the country.

Indeed, it is but little of anything that the poor husbandman has, in the end, for his labour. The Government tax is a first charge upon the entire crop. A tenth is the legal proportion to be paid to officials. But the season for the collection of *'ashâr*, or tithe, is often one of oppression and terror for the wretched villagers. Soldiers are quartered upon them, who practise all manner of excesses at the expense of their poverty-stricken hosts; and scenes of violence and rapine are all too common. The tithe has often to be paid over and over again to purchase peace. There is no other way; for if the despised *fellah* lifts his voice in protest or appeal, there is no ear to hear and none to sympathise. He can only thus bring down the iron hand more heavily on his own head. Of what remains, he must sell the most. But in the country there are no buyers; he must needs send it to the coast or sell it to agents for shipment abroad. Camels afford the only means of transport, and the cost is ruinous. A camel-load consists of two bags, and one of these must go to pay the hire of each camel. Only

half thus remains to be sold at Acre in the name of the grower; and happy is the man who receives from cameleers and agents all his due for this miserable remnant of his harvest.

What would our western agriculturists say to such conditions as these? Who can wonder if the people are utterly heartless, having neither spirit to cherish dreams of improvement nor courage to give them effect? What wonder if the thief and the robber increase in a land where honesty and industry are so severely punished? One can see what an incalculable blessing the opening up of this country by rail should be, putting it into connection with the outside world, and bringing all the civilising influences that elsewhere follow the wheels of the steam-engine. What the result will be remains to be seen. Should Israel come back with the returning tides of civilisation, he will find the land almost like an empty house, waiting for the return of its tenants. The scanty population would heartily welcome the advent of masters who could both instruct them in improved arts of husbandry and protect them against unrighteous exactions and oppressions.

The black remains of *Nowa* cover a large area. In its essential features the village resembles *es-Sanamein*, but lacks the relief afforded by the temples. A few fragments of ancient sculpture and architecture are scattered through the village, which also boasts a large tower, its most conspicuous feature, corresponding to those at *es-Sanamein*. Some have sought to identify *Nowa* with Golan, the ancient city of



TREADING OUT THE CORN

refuge. It commands a wide and beautiful prospect over the district for which Golan was appointed; beyond this there appears to be no reason for the identification. The place is associated in local tradition with the patriarch Noah. Whether the name was derived from this association or *vice versa*, who shall now determine? In any case, the grave of Noah is pointed out, a little to the north-west of the present village,—which suggests the reflection that, if we are to trust tradition, these old worthies must have been often buried; for I have stood by another grave where Noah was buried, and that at no little length, near *Zahleh* in Mt. Lebanon. The grave is many yards long, and even then, it is said, the patriarch's legs are doubled down. The mother of our race, also according to the Moslems, lies within sound of the Red Sea waves, in the sacred soil of *el-Hejaz*, while the Jews with equal earnestness maintain that she sleeps beside Abraham and Sarah, with Adam, within the holy precincts of Machpelah. The prophet Jonah has tombs almost anywhere, from *Mosûl* to the Mediterranean Sea.

CHAPTER II

Arab courtesy—*Sheikh Sa'ad*—Egyptian monuments—Traditions of Job—*El-Merkez*—Religious conservatism—Holy places—*Sheikh Meskîn*—A ride in the dark—*Zor'a*—*El-Lejâ'*.

One trait in Arab character must appear to strangers peculiar—the general unwillingness to say anything to a man's face which may be unpleasant. Truth may be stretched far beyond vanishing-point to avoid this. The results to the stranger are often unpleasant enough. If the traveller, still distant from his destination, ask one whom he meets how far he has to go, he may be told that in half-an-hour, or an hour at most, he will be there, when he may still have six or seven hours before him. The object is to make the traveller *mabsût*, or pleased, with the reply. Truth is sacrificed for a moment's pleasure,—typical of how much of the Arab's improvident life. On the other hand, if the destination is nearly reached, the traveller may be told it is hours away, that so he may be "much contented" to find himself suddenly there. We soon found that the only trustworthy means of learning the distance of a place was to go there.

Sheikh Sa'ad and *el-Merkez* are both seen from

Nowa. A stretch of almost level ground, soon covered at a smart gallop, we begin threading our way through the rocky flats surrounding the eminence on which the old village stands. We are in the very thick of the memories of Job, which linger more or less over all *Haurân.* On the southern shoulder of the little hill stands a small white-domed building, covering the spot, saith tradition, where Job sat during his afflictions. This contains "Job's Stone," a large block which Dr. G. Schumacher discovered to be an Egyptian monument, with a figure of Ramses II. Some years later Prof. G. A. Smith found at *Tell-esh-Shehâb* a stone with the cartouch of Sety I., the father of Ramses II. These are the only two Egyptian monuments yet known in *Haurân.* Immediately below is the *Hammâm Eyyûb,* "the bath of Job," where the man of patience is said to have washed when he was finally healed. The waters are held in high estimation by the country people as possessing marvellous healing virtue. Sweeping round to the right, we pass through the modern village, where a singular scene presents itself. Throughout all Syria and Arabia, one often meets the *'abd* — "slave," as every negro is called — but here only is a village community entirely black to be seen. At the sudden apparition of black faces and limbs, one might almost fancy himself transported to some strange hamlet in the *Sudân.* For these are Sudanese, whose parents and grandparents were brought hither, in the early days of the nineteenth century, by *Sheikh Sa'ad,* of pious memory;

and as yet they have kept their lineage pure. The change was a delightful one, from the sandy burning wastes of their native land to this sweet vale, which, with its lines of olive, groves of fruit trees, and musical ripple of cool water, must have seemed almost a paradise to those who had known the thirsty desert. It was inevitable that such a benefactor as their leader should be enshrined in grateful memory. We are not surprised to find him canonised, and the fruitfulness of the place ascribed to his saintly blessing. Thus, in these latter days, has the patriarch found in the modern saint a rival in popular regard; the dark man thinking little of Job and much of his own *Sheikh Sa'ad*, while the native *fellah*, overborne by the majesty of hoary tradition, bows in reverence before the old-world saint, esteeming the village sheikh a mere upstart. Chiefly round the banks of the little stream are the rival honours canvassed; for this has been regarded, from of old, as the gift of the patriarch of Uz, and now it is attempted to reverse the verdict of the grey centuries in favour of one who is revered only by a handful of immigrant *'abîd* ("slaves"). But who that knows the religious idiosyncrasies of the Arab will venture to say how soon the modern sheikh may not find a place in the Arab Valhalla? *Sheikh Sa'ad's* grave lies to the west of the village.

The appearance of *el-Merkez* is deceptive. Red tile roofs, rising above the foliage of surrounding trees, are associated in our minds with the comfort

and cleanliness of the West. And verily, were the hand of civilisation here, nothing is wanting in nature to make a pleasant village; but, alas! here is only the mailed hand of the Turk, which seems to crush while it protects, to ruin even while it builds. A sharp canter along a soft green meadow brought us to the entrance of a new street, partly paved. Young fruit-trees were planted confusedly around; and over to the left, on open ground, in front of their green tents, a company of Turkish soldiers were engaged in drill. Much of the village is new; but the building is poor, and the houses have already assumed the dreary, untidy aspect common to the Arab village. *Deir Eyyûb*, "the monastery of Job," covers an extensive area, but is now almost entirely ruinous. The Moslems claim the honour of its erection, but it certainly existed centuries before the prophet of Arabia was born. Part of the monastery is used as a barrack, and, close by the gate, another part contains the post and telegraph office. To the west is *Makâm Eyyûb*, where the reputed graves of Job and his wife are shown. In the early centuries of our era, the Christian inhabitants were wont here to celebrate an annual "Festival of Job." The antiquity of the tradition connecting the place with the patriarch's name is beyond all question. Dr. Schumacher found in the neighbourhood a place called by the common people "the threshing-floor of Uz." The towns whence came Job's comforters have been traced in the names of existing hamlets or ruins; notably Tēmā, the home of Eliphaz,

in the northern end of *Jebel ed-Druze*, two days', or perhaps only one long day's, journey eastward.

The Governor himself had gone on a tour of inspection through the towns of Gilead; but his *wakîl*, or representative, treated us with all courtesy, furnishing us with letters to the subordinate officers in the province, and drinking coffee with us to seal our friendship. We entered one of the least forbidding of the hovels in the bazaar, seating ourselves on upturned measures or logs of firewood. After negotiations with the host, there were set before us on the earthen floor a pan with eggs fried in *samn*—clarified butter, universally used in cooking—coffee in a pot remarkable for blackness, brown bread not free from ashes, milk, and pressed curd, which passes for cheese. During the progress of the repast, soldiers and natives came, in turns, to view the strangers; probably also with the hope of sharing the coffee. Wondrously acute is the Arab's perception of the odour of coffee, and swift are his feet in carrying him to it. Coffee-drinking, and more especially tobacco-smoking, consume a large proportion of the Arab's time. What a vacant life theirs must have been before the introduction of the fragrant weed! This latter now grows profusely all over the country. The coffee-beans of *el-Yemen* are esteemed superior to all others.

Mounting again, we turned our faces eastward. Not far from *el-Merkez* we found a copious cool spring, into which our horses dashed with delighted eagerness. Then we galloped away over a beautiful

country of rounded hill and soft vale, cultivated plain, and slopes of sweet pasture; anon our horses plunge to the saddle-girths in the stream that sheds fertility over wide acres. Far before us spread the rolling downs of *Haurân*, dotted all over with ruined towns and villages, like dark rocks amid the verdant ocean, that swayed in the spring breeze. Here and there were seen the Moslem *weleys*—little square buildings with white domes, sacred as covering the last resting-places of reputed saints. One of these we passed, perched on what must have been in times past a strongly fortified hill. A stream washes the foot of the mound, and on the opposite bank the music of a water-mill greets the traveller's ear. These *weleys* or *makâms*—"places" of the saints—witness to the marvellous continuity of religious thought and association in Eastern lands; for there is no doubt that most of these, situated as they are on high ground, are simply survivals of the ancient "high places," frequented by the inhabitants before the dawn of history, against which in later times the prophets raised their voices, taken over bodily by the religious system of Islâm. To these, at certain seasons, pilgrimage may be made by the faithful for prayer, in the belief that the spirit of the saint thus appealed to will by intercession secure an answer. But with the growing disposition to avoid all that savours of inconvenience, or that, lacking ostentation, brings no immediate credit to the performer among his fellows, such pilgrimages are now infrequent.

But the *makâms* are not without use. In lawless,

unsettled lands it is well to have some spots where property may be safe. What is placed under one of these domes even the most abandoned will hardly dare to touch, so strong is the superstitious dread of kindling the saint's wrath, whose protection has been thus invoked. In each of these a grave is found, with one marked exception. There are numerous *weleys* in the East, dedicated to *el-Khudr*—"the immortal wanderer," variously identified with St. George and the prophet Elijah. He is not dead, therefore he has no tomb; these are only his resting-places in his ceaseless wanderings to and fro upon the earth, destined once again to appear, declare all mysteries, and right all wrongs. Strange, weird tales are afloat of lights kindled by no mortal hand, appearing in these lonely *weleys* by night, and fading away with returning dawn. Then it is known that the Lord Elijah has visited his shrine, and passed forth again on his invisible circuit.

It is interesting to note the methods of measuring time adopted by those to whom watches are still unknown. We asked the miller how far it was to *Sheikh Meskîn*, or *Sh-Meskin*, as the natives call it. "You will go there," he said, "in the time it takes to smoke a cigarette." This is a common expression to denote a short time. It is like a flash revealing the extent to which cigarette-smoking prevails among these benighted peoples. Even in the remote wilds of *el-Lejâ'* we found the little coloured boards with elastic bands in which the white cigarette paper is secured, no other signs of civilisation being seen, save

the weapons carried. It is a sad reflection that these are the only heralds of her approach our boasted civilisation sends before her into these darker places of the earth.

Sheikh Meskîn is a large village, with many ancient remains and Greek inscriptions, situated on the western side of the *Ḥajj* road. Notwithstanding the cordial invitations of the inhabitants to stay with them until the morrow, for "the day was far spent and night was at hand," we were constrained to press onward to *Zorʿa,* where we knew our party must be awaiting our arrival, not without anxiety. Crossing the *Ḥajj* road, and wading deep pools in the bed of a winter stream which passes the village, we struck again through the fields, nearly due east, and over a beautifully rounded hill which seemed literally groaning under the heaviest crop of wheat I had ever seen. From the summit we saw across a narrow valley the border of *el-Lejâʾ*, within which, in the fading light, we could distinguish the outlines of *Zorʿa.* A low rocky hill, rising abruptly from the valley on the side next *el-Lejâʾ*, is crowned by a little village. This we knew to be *Dhuneibeh,* owned, with its lands, by a wealthy citizen of Damascus, a Christian; occupied entirely by Christians — Greek, of course — who cultivate the soil for him. Ere we reached the village the sun set, and a moonless night closed around us. Here we were overtaken by a soldier magnificently mounted and thoroughly armed. The kindly colonel at *Sheikh Saʿad,* fearing that dangers might beset us in the darkness, ordered the horseman

to follow, and see us safely to our destination. His fine horse, notwithstanding his rapid journey, showed not one drop of perspiration; and for his wonderful instinct in keeping the way in the dark we had soon reason to be thankful. Our road led over the mound, past *Dhuneibeh*—a most difficult ascent, and no easier descent, by reason of the unequal rocks, which we could no longer see. This is a great danger in travel by night over volcanic country. All is black under foot, and the path cannot be distinguished from its surroundings. The hospitable sheikh would have us await the first light of breaking morning; but finally, with many warnings to be on our guard, he gave us a guide who should conduct us past the immediate dangers of open ditch and cistern around the village. Even he lost the way several times in this short distance.

When we emerged from the labyrinth, the soldier's noble horse took the lead. His feet once fairly in the road, he went swiftly forward, and without a moment's hesitation conducted us triumphantly to our journey's end. At times we were cheered by seeing a light swinging away in the darkness, which we felt sure our friends had hung out to guide us. Occasionally we lost sight of it behind intervening obstacles, and, when seen again, owing to the windings of our path, it appeared to be now on this side, now on that, and but for observing the position of the stars we might have been perplexed. What a blessing these glorious luminaries have been for ages to the desert wanderer! As one gazes upward into

WILD ISHMAELITISH MEN

the clear Syrian sky, beholding them in all their splendour, he is forcibly reminded of Carlyle's graphic sentences: "Canopus shining down over the desert, with its blue diamond brightness [that wild, blue, spirit-like brightness, far brighter than we ever witness here], would pierce into the heart of the wild Ishmaelitish man, whom it was guiding through the solitary waste there. To his wild heart with all feelings in it, with no speech for any feeling, it might seem a little eye, that Canopus, glancing out upon him from the great, deep eternity, revealing the inner splendour to him. Cannot we understand how these men worshipped Canopus,—became what we call Sabeans, worshipping the stars?" But the difficult threading of one's path among basaltic rocks, with the howlings of wolf and jackal around, varied with the higher treble of the hyena, are not conditions favourable to such meditations. The district, moreover, has an evil reputation for quieter but more dangerous foes. It was with feelings of satisfaction that we found ourselves under the battlements of the old city of *Zor'a.* Messengers came with lanterns to meet us, without which I know not how we should have avoided the pitfalls that surrounded the last part of our way. With no little thankfulness the whole company met again around the table in our tent, to recount and hear the adventures of the day.

Our friends had enjoyed a pleasant ride along the border of *el-Lejâ'*; nor had their day been quite without adventure. In crossing a stream of some depth, one rider was treated to an involuntary bath—his

horse suddenly plunging down and rolling over. Happily no harm was done. It is not easy in such circumstances to preserve dignity on the one part and gravity on the other. Our friends, however, were quite equal to the occasion, and what might have been an awkward incident was soon a subject of pleasant jest to all concerned. But the occurrence indicates a real danger, of which the traveller ought to be aware. Walking in the great heat, with constant perspiration, if the saddle is not a good fit and skilfully padded, the horse's back is easily fretted and wounded. Then the animal naturally seeks relief when a chance comes, by rolling over and trying to remove the offending saddle. If the rider is in his seat, it may go hard with him. In passing through water there is a peculiar temptation to cool the injured spot by plunging down.

We awoke next morning to find ourselves fairly within the limits of *el-Lejâ'*. This is a tract of country famous from of old as a refuge for fugitives from law or justice. And no better land could be desired for this purpose. *El-Lejâ'* is equivalent to *meljâ'*—the word most commonly employed—and means a retreat or refuge. A more savage and forbidding rocky wilderness it would be impossible to imagine. It probably answers to Trachonitis of Josephus and the New Testament. Some have sought in it also the "Argob" of the Old Testament; but this identification is extremely precarious. Argob can hardly be rendered "stony." It seems rather to indicate rich arable soil, and the district is now generally located

to the south-east. "*Chebel Argob*" is the invariable biblical phrase, and "*Chebel*" would here be peculiarly appropriate. The word signifies primarily "a cord," then a measuring-line, then a district marked off as by a measuring-line, like a tribal portion, the boundaries being well known. This vast lava outbreak terminates abruptly all round in the fertile plains, almost suggesting the idea of a gigantic cord, drawn right round, marking it off distinctly from the surrounding country. It is admirably adapted for defence, and its capacities in this respect have been put to stern trial in many a hard-fought battle. The attacking force is completely exposed to the defenders' fire, the latter being as entirely sheltered. Often has a handful of men held the place against numbers which, in other circumstances, it would have been supreme folly to oppose. Notably was this the case when the celebrated Ibrahîm Pasha, the Egyptian, led his hitherto unconquered veterans to the attack, and was ignominiously repulsed by an insignificant company of Druzes. Within these adamantine walls, until quite recently, the Government was impotent; nor can we say its power is yet great. The suspected criminal, be he innocent or guilty, if he can only outstrip his pursuers and cross that rugged coast, will find a surer retreat than the Cities of Refuge ever afforded in ancient days. Among the inhabitants he will receive an unquestioning welcome. There he may dwell secure until a messenger of peace comes to call him again to home and friends, or until the King of Terrors summons him away.

Before us lay the ruins of a great old-world city, with much to declare its ancient splendour. *Zorʿa* is held by many to be the city Edrei, in the neighbourhood of which Og, king of Bashan, and his people met their crushing defeat at the hands of Israel. While I am disposed to favour its more southern rival, *Derʿat*, the claims of this city cannot be lightly passed over. It has been a position of great strength, and, lying on the border of the huge natural fortifications of *el-Lejâʾ*, the country's central citadel, it is not unnatural to suppose that this spot may have been chosen for the last desperate struggle with the victorious invaders. This city taken, foothold would be obtained within the great fortification itself—a basis for further operations against it. The defenders demoralised by this piece of singularly evil fortune, it fell a prey to the enemy, as it is safe to say it never has done since. The ruins of the city have often been described, in so far as they can now be seen; but much lies buried many yards deep under accumulations of debris. When the excavator shall have rescued ancient structures from their dark tombs, much may be learned regarding the city's past, of which so little now is known.

The soldier who followed us the previous night would have gone with us in any other direction, but one foot farther into *el-Lejâʾ* he would not move. We were told that his uniform would act, on Arab and Druze alike, as a red rag acts on a bull. We had great difficulty in finding a guide. Between the Druzes of the interior and the Christians around there is naturally little affection; there is less love,

if possible, between the former and their Moslem neighbours. Blood feuds are common ; and here the pursuit of the "avenger of blood" is no mere ruse, as it often is elsewhere, to extract money or goods from the tribe or village of the offender, but an earnest seeking for vengeance. Blood for blood is the law ; and if the actual manslayer cannot be found, any one of his tribe or village may be taken. This explains the difficulty travellers often have in finding suitable guides. Men do not care to be seen far from their own homes and comrades. Our difficulty was finally overcome, partly by the promise of handsome payment, partly by the exercise of the sheikh's authority on our behalf ; and at last a sturdy Arab, shouldering his club, stalked away over the rocks before us, under bond to conduct us safely to the Druze village, *Damet el-'Aliâ.*

CHAPTER III

A landscape of lava—Deserted cities—Caverns—Cultivation—A land of ruins—The guide's terror—*Damet el-'Aliâ*—The sheikh's welcome—A state of siege—An ugly incident—Druze hospitality—Arab and Druze in *el-Lejâ'*—St. Paul in Arabia—The well of the priest—Story of the priest.

From *Zor'a* our course lay north-east by east, and we hoped on the way to pass more than one ruin which should tell of the ancient glory of *el-Lejâ'*. What a wild solitude it is! Far on every hand stretched a veritable land of stone. The first hour or two of our march no living thing was seen. Even the little ground-lark, which hitherto we had seen everywhere, seemed now to have deserted us. Wherever we looked, before us or behind, lay wide fields of volcanic rock, black and repulsive, swirled and broken into the most fantastic shapes; with here and there a deep circular depression, through which in the dim past red destruction belched forth, now carefully walled round the lip to prevent wandering sheep or goat from falling in by night. The general impression conveyed was as if the dark waters of a great sea, lashed to fury by a storm, had been suddenly petrified; as if the fierce lineaments of the

tempest, and all its horror, had been caught and preserved forever in imperishable rock by the hand of a mighty sculptor.

At times we passed over vast sheets of lava, which, in cooling, had cracked in nearly regular lines, and which, broken through in parts, appeared to rest on a stratum of different character, like pieces of cyclopean pavement. Curious rounded rocks were occasionally seen by the wayside, like gigantic black soap-bubbles, blown up by the subterranean steam and gases of the active volcanic age, often with the side broken out, as if burst by escaping vapour; the mass, having cooled too far to collapse, remained an enduring monument of the force that formed it. Scanty vegetation peeped from the fissures in the rocks, or preserved a precarious existence in the scanty soil, sometimes seen in a hollow between opposing slopes. In a dreary, waterless land, where the cloudless sun, beating down on fiery stones, creates heat like that of an oven, it were indeed a wonder if anything less hardy than the ubiquitous thistle could long hold up its head.

We passed several deserted cities, built of the unvarying black stone, and surrounded by strong walls. Many of the houses are still perfect, and seem only waiting the return of their inhabitants. In one of these towns we found a church. It may be about fifty feet in length by about thirty feet in breadth, and is built in two stories, the roof of the first being composed of lava slabs, many of which are still in position. A Greek inscription containing the

name of Julios Maximos probably fixes its date about the time of Philip the Arabian. These walled towns were doubtless places of considerable strength in ancient days, and their stone gates may once have been secured by bolts and bars of brass. But, in the largest of them, not more than about four thousand inhabitants could ever have been comfortably housed. If this is remembered, it may aid towards correct impressions of the "cities" taken by the Israelites, and of the exploits of the warrior Jair.

There is not a stream or a perennial spring in all *el-Lejâ'*. The water-supply of its ancient and even of its present sparse population has therefore long been a subject of wonder. Near one of these towns by the wayside, we saw what probably suggests the solution of the mystery. This was a large natural cave, the roof partly broken through, and underneath a deep hollow in the rock, now brimming over with water from the winter's rains. It would have been next to impossible to pierce that hard rock with cisterns numerous and large enough to afford refreshment and water for other necessary purposes to man and beast. The work was not required. Nature had provided liberally herself. This cave may be taken as a type of the natural reservoirs in which this formation abounds. Josephus tells of the caves in Trachonitis, inhabited by robber bands and wild outlaws, whose inaccessible retreats secured immunity from punishment. No modern traveller has seen these; but this is not strange, for the few who have ventured within the borders of *el-Lejâ'* have not been



PEASANT PLOUGHMAN

(Photo, The Photochrome Co. Ltd.)

too curious in examining the wilder and more remote parts. The natives, however, know them well, and would resort thither in times of stress or danger. Indeed, some say that under the rough surface rocks it is nearly all hollow; so that one acquainted with the labyrinth could go from one end to the other of *el-Lejâ'* and never once show his head above-ground. From all this it is evident there is no lack of accomodation for storage of water; and, considering the quantity of rain which falls in its season, it would be a long drought indeed which would exhaust the supplies.

From this point onward the little openings among the rocks grow larger and occur more frequently. Our little friend, the lark, appears again; and the voice of the partridge and the whir of his wings, to right and left, relieve the dull monotony. When the traveller has fairly penetrated the rough barriers that surround *el-Lejâ'*, he finds not a little pleasant land within—fertile soil which, if only freed a little more from overlying stones, might support a moderate population. In ancient times it was partly cleared, and the work of these old-world agriculturists remains in gigantic banks of stones carefully built along the edges of the patches they cultivated. The hands that laid these courses have been cold for ages; the lichens have crept slowly over all, adorning the home of multitudinous snakes and lizards, now long held by its reptile tenants in undisturbed possession. These wise old husbandmen have had no worthy successors. The neighbouring rocks that echoed to

the sower's eager tread and the reaper's merry song lie under brooding age-long silence, broken only by the voice of the wild game, the cry of the solitary shepherd, or the bleat of the browsing herds. But here, as so often, generous Nature comes with a fold of her loveliest garment to hide the neglect of men. These patches were everywhere blushing with fair anemones and great ranunculi, which, seen in the distance, often appeared like a soft crimson haze, showing beautifully against the black of surrounding lava. The cyclamen, already past on the other side of Jordan, still clung to the clefts in the rocks; and the most delicate little irises were blooming in the interspaces, as if to soften with their sweet beauty the harsher aspect of the savage wilderness.

From every higher eminence we could trace, near and far away, the outlines of numerous ancient towns and villages. Nearly all are utterly deserted and desolate, haunts of wild beasts and birds of night. Here, and in other parts, we were deeply impressed with the fact that we were travelling through a land of ruins. How eloquent are these solitudes with lessons of warning for the great world of to-day! It would have been as difficult for the dwellers in these towns, and in the magnificent cities of the neighbouring country, to conceive of the "stranger" one day coming from "a far land" to walk through their desolate homes, and over the wreck of their architectural splendours, as it would be for the legislators who sit in Westminster to realise Macaulay's famous vision of the New-Zealander

sitting on the ruins of London Bridge, musing, like the noble Roman amid the ruins of Carthage, on the desolation around. But what has happened once may happen on a much grander scale again; for is it not the doing of the Almighty Himself, before whom all earthly splendour is but as the passing reflection of His own sun's light on the broken surface of the water? It is but the fulfilment of the wrath denounced by the prophet upon the rebellious and disobedient: "In all your dwelling-places the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; that . . . your works may be blotted out."

Coming nearer the centre of *el-Lejâ'*, fresh signs of the husbandman's presence were seen. Fields of waving wheat and barley alternated with rough knolls, dotted with furze and thorn, while scattered oaks and terebinths lent variety to the scene. Once, not long ago, large tracts were covered by a forest of terebinth; this has now almost entirely disappeared, the natives finding a ready market for the timber beyond their rocky confines, and the branches serving well for charcoal. This depletion of the forest is greatly to be deplored in a land where trees are such a blessing.

Some distance to the right, on lower ground, lay a town of the usual type, somewhat larger than those we had seen, with a tall square tower rising from the centre. The guide called it *Lubbain.* Directly in front, crowning a slight eminence, was *Damet el-'Aliâ*, where we hoped to spend the night, protected by the

hospitable and friendly Druzes. We doubted not of our welcome, and our faith was justified right handsomely by the event.

Another incident, however, was necessary to bring our experience into line with that of other travellers in these parts.

When we came within sight of *Dama*—so "*Damet el-'Aliâ*" is contracted—crowning a little eminence in front, our guide slowed his pace, hesitated, and finally halted. "There," he said, "is *Dama*; you can now reach it alone; I must return"; and nothing could induce him to move one step nearer the village. We would have had him see us safely there in fulfilment of his contract. But fear was written on every line of his face, so we were fain at last to give him his money and let him go. At once his countenance brightened, his frame became all energy and sprightly motion. In about three minutes he was out of sight. A horseman, fully armed and well mounted, swept down from the gate of the town, and, halting at some little distance, surveyed our party. His soldierly eye was soon satisfied that we were bound on no military exploit, and he came forward frankly to bid us welcome. For the entertainment of his guests he careered around, affording a fine exhibition of horsemanship. He proved to be the son of the sheikhly ruler of *Dama*; so we were already under the protecting influence of the Druze inhabitants—the sheikh's guests being the guests of all, among the dwellings of all his people. Stalwart, white-turbaned Druze

warriors came down from the roofs, whence they had watched our approach, to second the welcome of their chief's son, and accompany us to the sheikh's house. Thus we entered *Dama*, which early in the nineteenth century was the reputed capital of *el-Lejâ'*. It is still the chief of inhabited towns not situated on the borders, but now the proud title of capital would be a misnomer. It is the most central of all towns in *el-Lejâ'*. From its high position it commands a wide view, extending almost to the borders in every direction—a prospect not the less interesting because seen so seldom by European eyes. Enterprising travellers, one or two, may have been here in past years; but probably now for the first time ladies from the civilised West penetrated thus far into this famous but forbidding land.

The sheikh advancing, offered the heartiest of welcomes. He bade his subordinates attend to our horses, and with great dignity led the way under his hospitable roof. His house was most substantial, built of large basaltic blocks, well fitted, without mortar. The roof was composed of great slabs of the same material, covered with earth. The floor was earthen, with a hollow in the centre where blazed a great wood fire. What of the smoke passed our throats and eyes escaped by the door and a small opening in the opposite wall. A rude wooden door took the place of the ancient slab of stone, which might be seen forming part of the pavement in front.

We found a *baitâr*, or farrier, deftly plying his

hammer at the sheikh's threshold, making the nails which should hold the shoes of the village horses in place until another wanderer should come to make a new supply. These men, and occasionally the makers of the red shoes and flimsy long boots worn by the Arab, are often met in the remotest parts, making long journeys even into the unkindly desert, in search of livelihood for wife and little ones, left far behind in the shelter of their native towns.

Ushered into his dwelling, we sat upon straw mats spread on the floor, and leaned against straw-stuffed cushions arranged along the walls. Delicious buttermilk was brought to refresh us; also cool water to drink, and to wash withal. The good sheikh and his sons sat down on the floor, and busied themselves preparing coffee for their guests. This beverage is universally offered to the visitor on his arrival; but, while in western towns it is made by domestics, its preparation is an accomplishment held in high esteem among the sheikhly families of Druze and Arab. Those who are liberal with their coffee are called "coffee sheikhs"—a name held in honour, and much coveted by men of high spirit and generosity. A handful of coffee beans was put into a large iron ladle, which, resting on a small tripod, was held over the fire. The beans were stirred with a strip of iron, attached by a light chain to the ladle handle. When roasted to a rich brown colour, they were put into a large wooden mortar, brass-bound, and pounded with a hard-wood pestle, which resembled the heavy turned foot of an arm-chair. With marvellous precision the

youth who wielded the pestle raised it over his shoulder and struck fairly into the centre of the mortar. No little training and skill are necessary to beat such music from dull instruments as he produced with pestle and mortar, the pleasing cadences varying with the different stages of the process. The music of the pestle is esteemed as great an accomplishment as that of guitar or violin among ourselves. The fine brown powder was ready for the pot; a flavouring berry of cardamom was added, as a distinguished mark of honour; hot water poured on, it was left for a little to simmer by the fire. The first cup was thrown upon the fire as a libation to the tutelary spirit of the house—an interesting survival of old superstitious rites. A second cup was drunk by the sheikh himself, as an assurance to his guests that they might drink in safety—an assurance not wholly unnecessary in a country where men not seldom die from the effects of "a cup of coffee" adroitly manipulated. Then with his two little cups—about the size of china egg-cups, and without handles—he distributed the strong-tasting dark liquid to each in turn, repeating this a second and a third time as a mark of distinguished honour.

Meantime we were able to observe the general appearance of our host and his friends. The sheikh was rather over middle age, of average stature. His frame was well knit and athletic. The sandy whiskers, pointed beard, and light moustache left visible the firm, finely-chiselled lines of a face that had something royal in it. He wore the common red slippers; a

yellow striped *ghumbaz*, that reached to the ankles, gathered at the waist with a leathern girdle; over his shoulders was thrown an *'abâ'* or cloak of goat's hair, of the characteristic Druze pattern, striped alternately black and white. His red *tarbush* was surrounded by a thick turban of spotless white. He bore himself with an air of quiet dignity. Of a taciturn habit, he spoke but little. When he did speak his word secured instant attention and obedience. In such a position, constantly calling for wisdom, self-reliance, self-control, swift decision, and energetic action, with any basis of real character, a truly noble type of simple manhood is easily developed.

In the matter of dress, his followers resembled their chief. Every man of them, from the sheikh downwards, was a sort of walking armoury. They literally bristled with lethal weapons. Rifle and sword might be laid aside on entering the house, but the girdle contained pistols and daggers enough to make each man formidable still. The town is an outpost of the Druzes, taken by the strong hand, and maintained against the Arabs only by constant watchfulness and readiness to fight. This explained the careful scouting of us on our approach. For ourselves, however, we had nothing to fear. Since the fateful year in the history of Mount Lebanon, 1860, when the Druzes in their extremity were befriended by the British, every man who speaks English is sure of a cordial welcome among this people.

The Druzes well sustain the ancient tradition of hospitality in these parts. Our host invited the whole

party to supper. We were many, and hesitated to accept, lest it might seem imposing on his generosity. He silenced all objections by an intimation that supper was already in course of preparation; and with great thoughtfulness he ordered it to be served in our tents, judging that this would be more comfortable for us. These were pitched in the enclosed threshing-floor, in a hollow north of the village, sheltered from the night winds, which here blow cold, and overlooked by the sheikh's house.

We had soon further evidence that these men did not carry instruments of death for mere ornament. Two villagers accompanied some of us who went to shoot partridges. We were strictly warned to be home by sunset, but we were yet far off when the shadows began to thicken. Passing over a little hill in the dim twilight, we saw a solitary figure gliding swiftly along the bottom of the valley below. Our two companions unslung their rifles, and, with far-echoing alarum, dashed down the hill in full career upon the stranger. There was no mistaking their purpose. We stood with strange forebodings of evil to follow which we were powerless to prevent. The dark figure halted on hearing the shouts of his pursuers, turned, and approached them. To our infinite relief, they parted peacefully. Our guards, returning, said he belonged to a friendly tribe. Asked what would have happened had it been otherwise, they replied at once, "He should have died as a spy."

Returning with the fall of night, we found the table spread, and tray after tray of steaming viands was laid

out until it literally groaned—for a tent table, ours was strong—under the load. First a lamb roasted whole, then a kid stewed whole in *leban*, then a great tray of rice cooked with *samn* (clarified butter) as the Arabs know how, each grain whole and separate. A number of smaller dishes completed the repast, such as stuffed cucumber, *kibbeh* (a preparation resembling white or oatmeal puddings), *leban* (the ordinary thickened milk of the country), and bread in abundance. A light of pleasure gleamed in the kindly eye of the sheikh as he saw the ample justice done to his supper by the hungry travellers, whom he encouraged, by every means in his power, to eat and spare not. Loath was he to see anything remain uneaten.

Supper over, the sheikh and his followers set themselves for general conversation. It was particularly noteworthy that no question was asked and no subject started which might have disturbed the equanimity of the guests. It was inevitable that with such warlike spirits martial subjects should be discussed. We were interested in the sheikh's narration of some of the recent history of *el-Lejâ'*. The Druzes and the main Arab tribes in *el-Lejâ'* are hereditary foes. The memory of suffering and loss incurred in old strifes rankles in their bosoms, ever urging them to seek revenge. There is chronic blood-feud between them. Some time ago the Druzes held only positions near the south-east borders, but, waxing bolder, they advanced and took *Dama*, then a town utterly deserted. The position being strong, and the neighbouring land

fruitful, they thought it worth defending. The Arabs, unwilling to lose so valuable a prize, assembled in force, and, coming down upon the isolated occupants of *Dama*, were, after a tough fight, victorious. But the Druzes, while they retired, did not relinquish their claim. Securing themselves in the fastnesses in the south-east, they sent messengers through *Jebel ed-Druze* to rouse their friends, as the Scottish Highlands were roused of old by the fiery cross. These doughty warriors, as much at home in the turmoil of battle as in the peaceful work of field or vineyard, rushed forward in wild joy to redress their brothers' wrongs. Before the chosen men of the Druze nation the Arab irregulars could make no serious stand. They were defeated and driven away into the inhospitable, stony land to the north-west. In the morning light, straining our eyes in that direction, we thought we could dimly descry their black tents among the hardly less black surroundings. And since that time they have never mustered courage to renew the attack. They might, by a supreme effort, dislodge again the little colony in *Dama*; but they know the terrible vengeance that would be taken by the bold mountain men.

The conversation was intensely interesting, as, indeed, was the whole situation. These calm, dignified men before us, discoursing on the various chances of war in which they had themselves borne a part, and into which they might soon be plunged again; a head here and there, enveloped in a clould of smoke from pipe or cigarette; sparkling eyes,

glittering in eager faces that grew gradually darker as the lines receded into the night, leaving strange memories behind, when at last the sheikh and his followers went forth and vanished in the darkness.

Only the houses in the north-east of *Dama* are occupied. The most interesting structure in the town is an old church with Greek inscriptions, in the south-west quarter. Probably it corresponds in date with that we saw on the way. Such buildings are of frequent occurrence. The presence of so many remains of Christian antiquity over all these parts suggests reflections as to the extent to which Christianity had laid hold on the then inhabitants, in the beginning of its world-conquering career. The land enjoyed a second day of grace before the final outpouring of wrath and fulfilment of prophetic doom; and for a time it seems to have been roused to improve its privileges. By what agency was the evangel brought hither? Perhaps we may never fully know. But the Romans proudly styled these regions the province of Arabia; and through this the converted persecutor Saul at least passed, if he did not spend his three years' sojourn here ere going up, in his new capacity as apostle, to Jerusalem. The reasons for believing that the desert of the exodus was the scene of his retirement are not convincing. It harmonises ill with our ideas of the tireless energy of the apostle, who had just consecrated all his fiery devotion to his Lord, and in the first flush of his new-born zeal had proclaimed the truth to his countrymen in Damascus, to picture him haunting

the solitudes, where no ear could hear and no heart respond to the wonder of new-found love and joy which he was panting to express. May not these early years of discipleship have been bright years of missionary activity, more immediately successful than those covered by the record of the beloved physician? And, although their history has long been lost amid the darkness of ages, it is pleasant to think that, when the books are opened on high, the fresh light may reveal another brilliant in the glorious crown of the apostle, to be cast down at the Saviour's feet.

One took a jar and went to fetch water for us to drink. Wishing us to have the best and coolest, the sheikh called after him, "Bring it from the well of the priest." The name struck me as curious at the moment, but, knowing how persistently ancient names cling to particular spots, and not thinking it at all likely that a "priest" should be found in a Druze village, I thought no more of the matter. Afterwards, however, I heard a story of disinterested self-sacrifice for the sake of Christ which, told of a Syrian, was peculiarly refreshing to a missionary's ear; and, quite unexpectedly, the sheikh's words afforded valuable confirmation of its truth. The average Syrian character is the despair of the missionary. Those calling themselves Christians are most disappointing. What time one hopes to see a spirit of self-forgetfulness developing, and a disposition to give the best of life and ability to Christ's service, among the strangely varied peoples of Syria, he will probably be surprised by a request for some personal

favour or advancement. There are noble exceptions, of course, and I have known some, acquaintance with whom forms a permanent enrichment of life. It is well to remember, too, that the conditions in Syria are peculiar. Cut up as the population is into so many little communities, it is the very home of religious fanaticism. The mutual repulsions existing among these sections are terribly strong, each believing itself to be the true and only conservator of God's truth, and all others, in slightly varying degrees of blackness, simply children of the devil. In such surroundings the feeling grows slowly that those who possess the light are debtors to all who sit in darkness. They must be patiently dealt with; and the story of the priest is a help to patience, as showing of what self-devotion the Syrian character is really capable.

I received the story in fragmentary form, but so much is clear: A young priest of the Greek Church, a native of Mount Lebanon—the district which has contributed most of the native Christian workers in the country—had laid on his heart the necessities of the great dark land east of Jordan, and, in a spirit of true Christian heroism, he resolved to go forth, single-handed, to the work of evangelisation. He left the comparative comforts of his mountain home for the rude life of these wild regions, with no protection but that of his divine Master, counting the salvation of Moslem and Druze equally precious with that of his own people. He made his way into *el-Lejâ'*, staying in villages where he could find a



WELL IN THE DESERT

home for a little, and, when his position grew dangerous, passing on to others, carrying some little of the light of civilisation, as well as the evangel. Thus, arriving at *Dama*, he took possession of an empty house, put wooden frames with glass in the windows, swung a wooden door on hinges in the doorway, and arranged his scanty furniture within. The village lacked good water, so he had an old well cleaned out and repaired, and soon it was filled with wholesome rain-water. For about a year he went out and in among the warlike inhabitants, seeking to teach them the way of the Prince of Peace. A belief got abroad that he had found treasure among the ruins, and had it concealed in the house. A conspiracy was formed to kill and plunder him. He got news of the fact, and, seeing that his life was no longer safe, he was fain to move to another village, leaving a well of clear, cold water to preserve his memory, and, let us hope, also in some hearts a light that will lead to the Fountain of living waters. Exactly where he is now, I do not know, but some years later he was still in the district. "Persecuted in one city, he flees unto another."

CHAPTER IV

Hidden treasure—The Bedawy's treasure-trove—The sheikh's farewell—A savage tract—*Jebel ed-Druze*—*Umm ez-Zeytûn*—*Tell Shihân*—*Shuhba*—An ancient house—A stingy entertainer—The ruins—Pharaoh's "grain-heaps"—The house of *Shehâb.*

THE lust for treasure, which almost proved fatal to the priest, is common among all these semi-barbarous people. They are firmly persuaded that among the black ruins everywhere great hoards lie buried. Inscriptions, they think, contain directions how the precious stores are to be found, if they could only be read. But unfortunately they are in some mysterious speech which only the *Franj*—civilised foreigners—are supposed to understand. Interest in old ruins, in architectural remains, in anything that may shed light on former days, they regard as mere subterfuge. Many travellers have been struck with their unwillingness to show the whereabouts of inscriptions. They have a kind of dim hope that one day they may stumble upon the treasure themselves. Sometimes, however, they become confidential, and offer, for a consideration, say, half of what is found, to show the traveller all they know. They tell many stories, with full circumstantial details, of discoveries

of such heaps of gold. The noble metal is usually found by means of magical incantations, and every stranger is suspected of being the happy master of some such charm. At other times a mysterious conjunction of natural circumstances guides the lucky man to fortune.

One day, riding from *Der'at* to Gadara, a Bedawy entertained me with such a tale. Between these two towns runs the famous old aqueduct called by the natives *Qanâtîr Fir'aun*—"the arches of Pharaoh." A sheikh known to the Bedawy was wont, when a poor boy, to drive the cattle of which he had charge in the direction of a valley crossed by the aqueduct. On several evenings some of his cattle were missing, but in the morning they turned up again. Being sure they had disappeared about the end of the aqueduct, he seated himself early one morning on the building at a point commanding the valley, to see if possible whence his truant cattle should come. Quite near him soon a cow's nose appeared, followed by a pair of horns, rising, it seemed, from the earth. Rushing thither, he found the mouth of a large cave, hidden by the rough growth of grass and low shrubs. One after another the strayed members of his herd came forth. Then he entered, and almost swooned with amazement at the sight within. Great wealth of yellow gold lay heaped up in a hollow of the rock. He carefully marked the spot and nursed his secret all day. On returning home at evening, he secretly informed his father. They came with a horse, under the cloud of night, and carried off the *hurj* (saddle-

bags) full. Avoiding ostentation to escape the suspicion of wealth, they bought by slow degrees large herds of cattle and fine horses, until they ranked among the richest Arab families. It was believed that the store was not exhausted, but after that first visit all trace of the cave was lost. My informant had seen about the place, but could not find the exact spot. He was not without hope, however, that he might yet get his hands upon that gold. With how many Arabs it is so. They cherish a vague expectation that one day, without industry or thrift, they may find themselves suddenly rich. With their inborn hatred of toil, this idea runs through all their wild improvident life.

Difficult as it would be for a stranger to find his way without a guide anywhere in *el-Lejâ'*, it would be next to impossible in the district through which we had to pass on leaving *Dama*. Our host therefore told off one of his retainers, who, armed to the teeth like all his fellows, rode before us. The good sheikh strictly refused all recompense for his kindness; but he asked, and we cheerfully gave, a note making known to all who might read, what hospitable treatment we had received at his hands. No doubt he hoped that in days of stress this might commend him to the favour of our people. He had planted the tree, but, alas, was not destined to see the fruit.

Shuhba, where we hoped to sleep that night, lies beyond the south-eastern border of *el-Lejâ'*, on a spur of *Jebel ed-Druze*. We rode over a great breadth

of *wa'r*—a dry, rocky region, with hardly a green thing to be seen. Then we entered a more open country, with flocks of sheep and goats in search of pasture, following their scantily-clad shepherds. This was soon passed. The path before us darkened again, and we found ourselves in the midst of the most forbidding tract of country we had yet seen. Scorched and blackened by the elemental fires, the volcanic rocks towered high in great irregular masses, or stretched out in stone-strewn levels, rent and torn in every direction into wide chasms, whose horrid, jagged lips seemed yawning to devour us; while black mounds rose here and there, like the remains of long-extinguished huge bonfires. Over wide areas not one blade of grass was seen. This was the scene of Ibrahîm Pasha's signal defeat. It is a natural fortress, which a few resolute spirits might easily defend. Indeed, until one has seen this part, he cannot realise how fully the district justifies its name, *el-Lejâ'*—"the refuge" or "retreat." Soon after our visit the Druzes had an opportunity of profiting once again by the impracticable character of the land. How their impetuous spirit and wild bravery robbed them of the advantage we shall see in the sequel. One of the first to fall, pierced in the forehead by a rifle bullet, was our generous entertainer of *Damet el-'Aliâ*.

The last belt of dark rock safely passed, we came upon flower-strewn patches resembling those whose brilliant beauty had charmed us on the other side of *Dama*. Riding on under an oppressive sun,

with a wide prospect over *Haurân* to the south, beyond the southern coast of *el-Lejâ'*, and a striking view of *Jebel ed-Druze* in its full length before us, we reached a rocky height overlooking a gently sloping valley, in the bottom of which we were rejoiced to see the inviting gleam of water. Crossing the stream, we left *el-Lejâ'* behind us, and rode south-eastward over low-rolling downs of rich soil towards the base of the mountains. The little village *Umm ez-Zeytûn* stood on an eminence to the right. "Mother of Olives" the name means, but none of her daughters are now visible. A flying visit was paid to the village. The modern houses, or hovels, are built upon the site of an ancient city, large and beautifully cut stones from the old ruins contrasting almost grotesquely with the miserable structures they have been employed to rear. The Druze inhabitants we found most courteous and obliging; they answered all questions, and volunteered information as to the best and shortest roads, apparently out of sheer goodwill.

Burckhardt's experience on his second visit here was very different. The thought of treasure had inflamed the people's minds. When first there, he copied some inscriptions; ere his return, it was noised abroad that he had carried off great treasure from *Shuhba*, and, being unable to take all at once, was coming back for the remainder. His escape from their hands he attributed to threats as to what would happen should he be injured, and to the free use of oaths. The latter was probably more effective than

the former, since, inveterate swearers as all are, there are few who would not be daunted by the earnest cursings of an injured man. Of the character and strength of the language then employed some idea may be gathered from such a Psalm as the hundred and ninth, the very reading of which makes one's blood run cold: what must it be to have such curses hurled at one, red-hot from the flaming heart of a man in wrathful earnest!

Rejoining our companions, we approached the base of a beautifully formed pyramidical hill, *Tell Shihân*, which rises abruptly from the plain to a height of some six or seven hundred feet. The gracefully rounded outline is interrupted near the top, where there is a slight flattening towards *el-Lejâ'*. Doubtless from this crater, in the active volcanic age, the glowing streams flowed westward, to cool into the stern tracts we had seen. The road resembled those often seen at home, made of the refuse from smithy fires, the brittle cinders having withstood exposure to all weathers for millenniums, crunching cheerfully beneath the horses' feet. The hill was green to the very crest. Here for the first time we found by the wayside a species of iris, from which in our further journeyings we derived no little pleasure. It is a glorious flower, fully two inches in diameter, the lovely velvety petals shading off from a dark blue to a delicate purple. Some were rather lighter in colour. However long the journey, we never thought the time ill spent in pausing to look at these wonderful blooms, spreading in the solitudes

with the sweet tendance only of sun and shower, like a veritable "smile of God."

Tell Shihân fairly rounded, the horses' feet plashed again in running water; to the left a little waterfall, white and flashing in the light, made music in the still air, and just below it stood one of the mills that haunt the waterfalls like shadows. From this point the path to *Shuhba* winds up a steep hillside, among great lava blocks, the surroundings for a time almost vying in blackness and wildness with the western parts of *el-Lejâ'*. The ascent we accomplished under a heavy thunder-shower, which so thoroughly soaked everything that we were driven to seek more comfortable quarters than would have been found in damp tents pitched on muddy ground.

Very imposing are the walls which still in great part surround the old city; more imposing still is the ancient gateway, by which we entered from the north, although it is now partially blocked with ruins. Immediately within the gate, the iron-shod hoofs clanked merrily on an excellently preserved pavement. This is the great street running from north to south, dividing the city, and the pavement appears to be entire. I do not think a better example of this kind of Roman workmanship is anywhere to be seen. On either hand were the dreary blackened ruins with which we were now so familiar, while before us we could see the forms of tall columns rising into the twilight sky. We saw no trace of inhabitants until we reached the south-western quarter, which alone is occupied.



SHUHBA, BATHS AND ROMAN PAVEMENT

Our guide took us straight to the house of the sheikh, who advanced to meet us with profuse expressions of welcome. Dismounting in the street, we followed him at his invitation. With difficulty we made our way dry-shod over a huge pool of rain-water which had collected in front of the arched doorway, through which we entered a wide courtyard. To the left stood a rickety erection, in the construction of which some of the finest materials from the old buildings had been employed. A broad stairway of large lava blocks led up to it. A roof of branches and brushwood rested upon gracefully hewn marble pillars, which were tied together at the top by a rude architrave. These in turn were supported upon beautiful capitals, turned upside down, and on carved blocks of stone. The back wall was of the usual mud-built character, and the pavement was rough in the extreme. A *diwân* round three sides doubtless provided sitting accommodation for the sheikh and his friends in fine weather. Nothing could better mark the low level of the present inhabitants than their pride in such a bit of ill-fitting, incongruous patchwork as this, in proximity to the magnificent remains of a past civilisation.

A strange, rambling old house it was into which we entered by a narrow winding passage from the left corner of the courtyard. First we found ourselves in a series of great gloomy apartments communicating with each other in a line east and west; then, turning to the right, we scrambled through a doorway, the broken threshold of which

was some feet above the level of the floor; and, pushing forward, we entered a second courtyard, much smaller than the first, with rooms all round, on one side two stories high. Some remains of ancient ornamentation were still visible on the walls, and the pavement of the yard was evidently from of old. Here were our quarters for the night, the gentlemen having two little rooms, one of which served as dining-room, on one side, and the ladies a larger room on the other. The stair leading up to the gentlemen's apartments had been failing for centuries, and now was nigh unto falling; but, observing great caution, we all escaped without accident.

Our host for this night formed a contrast in every respect to the dignified and magnanimous chief of *Damet el-'Aliâ*. A short, thick-set man, with stubbly white beard, very red nose, and puffy cheeks, he bustled about with the air of a man who does a very great favour indeed. With evident pride he displayed his rooms, and fished for compliments, suggesting that they were beautiful and clean, *mithl lokanda*—"like a hotel." Ideas of cleanliness differ, but we avoided controversy by gently turning the conversation to the subject of our entertainment. This we were allowed to provide for ourselves, even to the coffee, of which he seemed glad to drink a share. He was one of the less noble sort; and, his people taking their cue doubtless from their chief, our servants found it difficult to secure all necessaries at reasonable prices. But as the night closed darkly around us, and the mountains were alternately lit up by sheets of blinding lightning

and filled with loud rolling thunder, while the rain fell in torrents, and the wind whistled eerily among the ruins, we were thankful, even with all its drawbacks, to be under such substantial shelter. If, for reasons which need not be specified, we slept but little, we could all the more realise our good fortune, in that, on these high, open uplands, we were not exposed to the full fury of the tempest.

The morning broke clear and beautiful, and we were out betimes to make a rapid survey of the old remains. A few paces north of the chief's house we struck the main street running east and west. It seems just possible, from the remains of bases here and there, that this may once have been a pillared street like that at *Jerash*, so striking even in its desolation ; or that at Gadara, where the columns lie prone and broken along the whole length. Following this street eastward, it sinks rapidly, and passes under a long archway, which might almost be called a tunnel, strongly built of dressed basalt. This doubtless formed the substruction of some important public building. A blacksmith has his workshop in one of the deep cellars in the side of the archway, and his blazing fire sends cheerful gleams through the gloom. Beyond this archway eastward lie all the ruins possessing special interest for the visitor. To the south of the road stands the great amphitheatre. Carefully built of massive stones, the walls and tiers of seats are still almost entire. It is the best preserved of all such structures to be seen east of the Jordan, and it appears to have been one of the largest. Several

poor Druze families were in possession of the lower parts of the building when we visited it, and very comfortable houses they made—superior certainly to any of the modern erections around.

We visited in succession a great sunk octagonal building, as to the use of which we could make no satisfactory guess; the ruins of several temples, one of which must have been of no ordinary splendour; and the remains of the *tetrapylon* which once graced the crossing of the two main streets. Now only three of the original four massive bases are to be seen, and the arches have entirely disappeared. We scrambled over rickety walls and scattered stones, and crawled into noisome crypts in search of sculpture and inscription. We saw enough to persuade us that a rich harvest may be gathered here by the patient explorer. Of the ancient baths which stood in the south-eastern quarter not far from this crossing, very large portions are still in a good state of preservation, and form, perhaps, the most interesting part of all the ruins.

The material employed in their construction, like that of all the buildings in the city, is basalt, and in parts the appearance is very fine; but no adequate idea of their original splendour can now be formed. The rows of gaping holes in the walls tell of the lining of marble with which they were once adorned. The destruction of this was doubtless dictated by the desire to possess the iron fastenings by which the marble slabs were held in position, and the lead by which these were fixed into the walls—a temptation which the cupidity of the Arabs would make it extremely

difficult for them to resist. The water channels are skilfully built into the walls, and from the points at which they project we may guess where the baths were placed; but the floors are now entirely heaped over with ruins. The walls are still over thirty feet in height, and of great strength. Most interesting of all, in connection with the baths, is the old aqueduct, by which the water was conducted across the low valley to the eastward from the hills beyond. Several of the substantial arches are still standing, and the line can be traced away towards the eastern uplands. Eleven or twelve miles was the water brought to minister to the comfort of the splendid, luxury-loving Roman.

These and other similarly great structures we owe to the ancients' ignorance of the principles of hydrostatics. Only when we gaze upon such vast undertakings, where the channel was raised by artificial means, so that the water might flow along a regularly inclined plane, do we fully realise what an immense saving of labour the discovery of these simple principles has proved to the modern world.

The ancients appear to have spent their strength in the erection of public buildings. The houses of the common people seem to have had nothing special about them. Built of the ordinary black basaltic stone which abounds in the neighbourhood, they have long since gone to ruin, probably in the shocks of earthquakes. West of the town stand two beautifully formed conical hills. Some of our party who ascended them found them to be extinct volcanoes—one having

a circular, cup-like crater in the top. Seen from a distance, these hills bear a striking resemblance to heaps of grain on a great threshing-floor. This resemblance has not escaped the sharp eyes of the imaginative Arabs, who call them "the grain-heaps of Pharaoh." Local tradition associates them with the name of a notable oppressor of the people, the builder of the *Qanâtîr Fir'aun* ("the arches of Pharaoh"), the great aqueduct which stretches from the neighbourhood of *Nowa* past *Der'at* to Gadara. Having exhausted the people with taxes for the completion of this work, he finally seized all the grain in the land and stored it here, ready for his own purposes. He sent a gigantic camel to fetch it, and just as the unwieldy animal drew near, the wrath of God was kindled against Pharaoh, and a bolt from the clouds blasted grain and camel together, leaving two blackened heaps as monuments of the impotence of all earthly tyrants before the King of heaven.

This town is believed by many to represent the ancient Philippopolis. True it is that "Philip the Arabian," a native of this region, having been elected emperor by the army in Syria about the middle of the third century—244-249 A.D.—founded a city in his native country, and adorned it in Roman fashion. But so little is known with certainty on the subject, that almost any considerable site in *Haurân* may claim the honour, if honour it be. The modern name of *Shuhba* is said to be derived from the noble Moslem family of *Shehâb*, who in the early years of the Mohammedan era came northward from Arabia

Felix, and in their wanderings, before settling in Mount Lebanon, made this city a temporary home. Relatives of the prophet of Arabia, they received distinguished honour, and assumed a leading part in the affairs of the Lebanon. The name of *Emîr Beshîr Shehâb* was well known in Europe in the earlier half of the nineteenth century. This prince of all the Lebanon fell in the year 1840; and the family, already shorn of much of its glory, went finally down amid the bloody revolutions of 1860.

There is a prevailing belief among the uninstructed in all parts of the country that the *Franj*—the name given to all Westerns—are literally loaded with gold. To this belief we owed a somewhat unpleasant experience. The avaricious old sheikh took counsel with a faithless one among our attendants, who evidently wished to smooth the road for his own return by satisfying the cupidity of the natives at our expense. He advised the sheikh to demand a most outrageous sum for our entertainment, in which demand the said faithless one should support him. The arrangement was at once agreed upon. Meantime a second attendant, who bore no love to the former, having overheard the plot, revealed the whole. We decided the amount and manner of payment, taking care that there should be no reasonable ground of complaint. Finding himself detected, the sheikh's accomplice ignobly forsook him. When the money was put into his hand, with expressions of thanks for shelter afforded, the old man could not conceal his surprise, and it was some time ere he recovered

sufficiently to hint that the sum was small. Just before we started, a few piastres extra were added, to save what little of dignity he possessed. He, as well as we, wished everything done in secret, knowing well that a report of his mean conduct spreading among his brother sheikhs in *Jebel ed-Druze* would prove fatal to his reputation, especially as *Englîze* were in the question. This was the only display of meanness or stinginess we met with east of Jordan; and for even this our own servant was chiefly to blame.

CHAPTER V

Ride to *Kanawât* (Kenath)—Impressive situation and remains—Place-names in Palestine—Israelites and Arabs—Education—A charming ride through mountain glades—*Suweida.*

WE left the city by the southern, the only double gate the city boasted, as it is still the best preserved. Here also the city wall is seen in something like its original proportions. Our way led straight southwards from the gate, along a track lined on either side with fallen and broken columns, which showed that the splendour of the old city had been by no means confined within the walls. A large pool had formed in the hollow to the right during winter, and, replenished by the previous night's rain, afforded refreshment to the horses ere they faced the steep hill before them. By a zigzag path we soon ascended to a considerable height, finding far more various vegetation than we had thought possible.

Riding thus along the western slopes of the mountain, a wonderful panorama spread out before us: *Shuhba*, which we had just left, black and desolate-looking on its blasted hill; the whole extent of *Haurân, el-Lejâ'*, *Jaulân*, and Gilead; *Jebel esh-Sheikh*, throwing high his gleaming shoulders in the north-

west; while once again we could see the Safed hills and the uplands of Lower Galilee, with Tabor's rounded cone distinctly visible above his fellows. We could almost trace all our wanderings from the point where we entered the *Haurân*, through the scorched fields of *el-Lejâ'*, on to the mountain over which we were passing. And here it was impossible to avoid noting once more the dark spots over the far-stretching plains, marking the positions of ancient towns now waste and ruined. To the traveller in this country, almost fabulously rich in agricultural wealth, the phrase "a land of ruins" ever and anon returns like the refrain of some sad song. A lower road from *Shuhba* leads by way of *Suleim* and *'Atyl*, each with ruins of interest—the former of a temple, subsequently a Christian church; and the latter of two temples. But it was much longer, and we feared the hollows would be heavy from the rain; and wishing to have as much time as possible in *Kanawât*, we took the way across the mountain. The immediate surroundings were dull, but descending a little, and turning a spur of the hill, a scene of surpassing beauty met our eyes. The valley below opened into a fair plain, embosomed among the mountains, where teams of oxen, guided by peasant Druzes, in their white turbans and tricoloured coats, drew furrows in the soft soil with wooden ploughs, contrasting picturesquely with the brown and green of the surrounding slopes. The southern edge of the plain is washed by a little stream; beyond it the rising ground was covered with glancing foliage, over which rose the

tops of tall columns. Eastward the valley narrowed, and the stream dashing down a precipice many feet high, formed a delightful waterfall, on either side of which were gathered the ruins of *Kanawât*. The mountains, grey in the changing light, formed a pleasing background. Just as we swept round in full view, a light shower drifted down the valley. The sun, striking through the rain on glistening foliage, white waterfall, and stately ruins on the brow of the hill, transformed the whole into a vision of fairyland. It seemed as if the stream of time were suddenly turned back, and the broken, hoary city on the height smiled again in the beauty and splendour of her youth. So complete was the illusion, that the passage of warriors long dead, with the kingly form of Herod in their midst, hotly pursued by the wild Arabians, would have seemed so natural as hardly to excite surprise.

We crossed the plain, waded the stream, and climbed the slope towards the city. Leaving the ruins of a fine temple crowning a leafy knoll, to the right, we pushed on through thickets of ground oak and thorn, a strong prickly network of brambles covering all the undergrowth. The lower part of the town presents nothing distinctive. It is only partially inhabited by a colony of Druzes. Many of the empty houses are quite perfect, stone doors and windows in position, and swinging as easily as they did to the hands of their old possessors. Going as far as we dared along the edge of the cliff, over which this part of the town seems to impend, we obtained a fine

view of the gorge into which the waterfall descends, and also of the picturesque old mill by which the water-power is utilised for the benefit of the inhabitants. Turning cautiously, we retraced our steps, and entered the street leading to the sheikh's house. As he was absent we could not pay him our respects. An easy ascent leads to the upper town, where, in open spaces, all the great buildings were gathered. We crossed the broken remains of a fine old aqueduct, just above the waterfall, beside the ruins of a gigantic wall; and climbing over shapeless heaps of stones, many of them beautifully cut and carved, we entered the largest of all the structures that tell of glories long waxed dim. It is variously called by the natives *es-Seraiah*—"the Palace," and *Makâm Ayyûb*—"the place of Job." Thus, on either side of the great plain, on which in the far past, as tradition hath it, his flocks browsed and his husbandmen gathered the golden harvests, a spot is consecrated to the patriarch's memory.

The *Seraiah* is a group of massive buildings, adorned with colonnades and artistic sculptures. Around a doorway still almost entire, opening on a wide paved space, are beautifully carved bunches of grapes, leaves, and flowers. On the lintel of a door leading from one part to another, a cross is cut in the stone, indicating the presence of Christians at some period, while one of the halls has evidently been used as a church. These apartments are of spacious dimensions, the smallest of the three measuring eighty feet by seventy. Most likely they were originally dedicated



KANAWÂT. RUINS OF TEMPLE

to heathen gods. What information as to the ancient city and its noble buildings may be buried under the great piles of debris no one can say; but few places, I should think, on either side of Jordan would better repay the excavator's toil.

Our cloth was spread on the stump of a fallen column, in the innermost shrine. Sitting around on huge blocks, finding shelter from the sun, we enjoyed our mid-day meal. Troops of kindly Druzes gathered about, ready to bring *leban*, cheese, milk, bread, or whatever viands were at their command. The horses, having been refreshed from the brook, seemed to appreciate the cool shade of the middle chamber, haltered to the stately columns.

The remains of *Kanawât* might well engage attention for as many days as we had hours to spend. On the opposite bank of the deep valley is a small theatre almost wholly cut out of the solid rock, about sixty feet in diameter, with a cistern in the centre of the area. A Greek inscription intimates that it was built by Marcus Lysias, probably a wealthy Roman officer, for the delectation of the inhabitants of *Canatha*. A little higher up stands a temple of modest proportions, and still further eastward a large tower, resting on massive substructions, evidently of high antiquity. This is approached by steps hewn in the rock. Close by is a lofty round tower, probably sepulchral. Just visible over the oak thickets above us on our way to *Suweida*, we saw several similar towers. If we cannot fix their date, it is clear at least that they belong to a time in the far past. Of

the great reservoirs, whose arched roofs have in many places been broken through, we could make no minute inspection. They lie between the *Seraiah* and the remains of a noble temple, of which the thick side walls are standing, while in front a few columns of splendid proportions rise from a huge confused mass of great stones. It was perilous climbing, many of the blocks being ready to fall; but the view from the top justified the risk and toil. The commanding situation of the ancient city is seen to advantage. On a gentle slope of the mountain, overlooking at no great distance the wide plain, then as populous as it is desolate to-day, with plentiful natural supplies of water, rich soil, and thick embowering forests, it was just such a spot as the splendour-loving Herod might well select for lavish adornment. Traces of a hippodrome are found close to this temple, and several of the gardens cultivated by Druzes are surrounded partly by old walls and partly by new walls of old materials. The grouping together of so many noble buildings, within so small space, the graceful shafts of beautiful columns rising in clusters here and there, reminded one of Athens; but the dark stones lacked the dazzling effect of the white marbles on the Acropolis.

The name *Kanawât* probably points to that the city bore ere it fell into the hands of the conquering Israelites, when it was called Nobah—a name of which there is now no trace. Before the days of Christ the old name had reasserted itself, and Josephus calls it *Canatha*—a very slight change from the ancient

Kenath. The identity of *Kanawât* with *Canatha* is certain. It is interesting to observe, all over Palestine, this reappearance of ancient names, and the practical obliteration of those imposed by temporary rulers. The present *Beisân* is clearly a modification of the old *Bethshean*, *Scythopolis* being forgotten. *Banias* is simply the Arabic form of the Greek *Panias*, the Arabs having no *b*; *Cæsarea-Philippi* is known only to strangers. *Beitîn* is evidently another case, representing the ancient *Bethaven*; while *Bethel* is locally unknown. It would be interesting further to inquire how the characters of the trans-Jordanic tribes affected the nomenclature of the land. They were essentially a pastoral people. This tended to cut them off from the other tribes. They never took kindly to the agricultural life prevalent on the west of Jordan. Their nomadic habits would leave the captured cities more or less open for the return of their inhabitants from the fastnesses to which they had been driven; and of course they would bring the old names with them. Thus *Nobah* and *Bashan-havoth-Jair* are names to be found only in the Bible records.

The remarkable facial likeness to the Jews found among the people east of the Jordan leads one to wonder if there is not a closer relationship than that of cousinship between the two races—if, in short, the eastern tribes did not in the end mingle freely with their nomadic neighbours, and thus become gradually alienated in sympathy from the people and religion

of Israel, as they were already separated from them by the mighty gorge of Jordan. It was this very calamity the prophetic foresight of their fathers sought to obviate, when they erected the gigantic altar of witness "in the forefront of the land of Canaan, in the region about Jordan, on the side that pertaineth to the children of Israel." It should be an altar of witness to succeeding generations of the unity of the people, lest the children of the tribes westward should be tempted at any time to say, "What have ye to do with the Lord, the God of Israel? For the Lord hath made a border between us and you." The real danger lay in another direction. Thus there was a certain fitness in the fact that these eastward tribes were the first to bear the brunt of the great invasions from the north by which Israel was scourged.

A Druze villager who attached himself to our company proved a pleasant and chatty companion. Bright eyes looked out from under his spotless turban; black whiskers and shining white teeth combined with a frank, open countenance to prepossess us in his favour. He said he had been teacher in a school which the *Englîze* had supported for some time in the village. By way of corroboration he aired a few words of English picked up from his superior. Very strangely they sounded from his lips, without any connection, and seemingly so out of place amid these surroundings. His acquaintance with English was like that of a Syrian gentleman friend of mine, who occasionally in company announces



KANAWAT, SCULPTURED DOORWAY IN TEMPLE.

that he knows English. "What," he will ask, "is English for Narghîleh?" And without waiting for reply, exclaims, "*Hubble-Bubble!*" laughing heartily at his own joke.

The school had been summarily closed by the authority of the Government, to the sorrow of the villagers, who were beginning to appreciate the advantage of a rudimentary education. There is a great field for missionary enterprise—medical by preference—in all this region. The missionary's efforts would find assistance in the generous instincts of the people themselves. They are yet uncorrupted by the unhappy influences associated with the passage of the great travelling public. These are often, unfortunately, all of civilisation known to the untutored inhabitants; and the barriers thus raised against the missionary and his work can be fully appreciated only by those who have had them to face.

Our cheery companion waited until we were all mounted, then led the way, by many tortuous windings, through the old town, to an opening which had once been a gate, on the road to *Suweida.* Few traces are left of the ancient Roman road, and soon we were on a track of the usual kind, very soft in parts, from the recent rains. We passed between fruitful vineyards and cultivated patches, where the white turbans of the vine-dressers moved to and fro among the green with pleasing effect. Our ride that afternoon along the hillsides, through oak and thorn thickets, the green interspaces sprinkled with

flowers, openings in the foliage affording glimpses of the wonderful plains of Bashan, was the most agreeable by far of all we enjoyed in *Haurân*. The freshness of the leaf, the music of the birds, and above all, the cool breeze that met us, almost persuaded us that the Orient was but a dream, and that we were traversing an upland in Bonnie Scotland.

Through a break in the forest we descried our tents, pitched on the green sward, and ready for our reception, beside a curious-looking block of masonry. Then sweeping round into the open, we obtained our first view of *Suweida*, lying darkly on the farther bank of a little ravine, by which it was separated from our camping-ground. The roofs were alive with men straining their eyes in our direction. Our advent clearly caused no small stir in that remote town. Arriving at our tents, we found a large company assembled to survey us. They watched all our movements with an amused curiosity, like that of children in a menagerie. We were in time to witness the sunset, and in the calm cool air were tempted to watch how long he took to disappear, from the instant when his under rim touched the horizon. We looked earnestly, and seemed relieved when at last he vanished. Our observers, I am sure, entertained a shrewd suspicion that some remnants of sun-worship still lingered among these curious westerns. Little thought they how our hearts followed the departing beams to the land where, in the slant rays of the longer evening,

dear ones sat musing, drawing vague pictures of regions famed in sacred story, and praying the Father of all, the light of whose eye fades not from earth like the passing day, to guard the wanderers from peril.

CHAPTER VI

Healing the sick—A strange monument—Telegraph and post in *Haurân* —Cruel kindness—The Ruins of *Suweida*—Turkish methods of rule—*'Iry*—*Sheyûkh ed-Druze*—Jephthah's burial—Enterprise of *Ismâ'îl el-'Atrash.*

Here, as at every point touched in our journey, we had ample evidence of the prevalence of sickness and suffering, and of the crying necessity for competent medical aid. The weak and diseased are a prey to every travelling quack, and they bore in their bodies only too convincing proof of their simple-hearted confidence in men who professed to be able to relieve them. Ruined eyes and maimed limbs told only too plainly what havoc unscrupulous men work among these trustful people. The quack hopes to pass but once in any given way, and cares but little for the results of his operations if only he make present gain. The name of the good doctor wrought like magic. Almost before we could realise it the camp was surrounded by patients; a motley gathering they were—Moslem, Druze, and Christian; men, women, and children, of all ages, clad in richly varied costumes; they came forward, one by one, to tell of their sufferings, and receive what help was possible.

Not unpleasantly the time passed, examining antique coins, making cautious purchases, and engaging the more intelligent in conversation about their town and district, until the cheerful voice of the dinner-bell summoned us within.

With the morning we were able to see the strange tower under whose shadow we had slept. It is reputed one of the oldest monuments in the country. According to inscriptions, Greek on one side and Palmyrene on another, it was built by one Odainatus to the memory of his wife Chamrate. The building is over thirty feet square, and rests on a base, to which a couple of steps lead up. Between the Doric pilasters that adorn the sides, the monument is ornamented, as became the tomb of a soldier's wife, with emblems, in relief, of military accoutrements. The top of the monument is now a heap of confused blocks, while many great stones, rolled down, lie in utter disorder to the south-west. The name *Debusîyeh*, by which it is known among the natives—"the pin-shaped"—shows that it was, probably at no remote period, finished off in a pyramid. The evil that has befallen it may be due to some thought that buried treasure might be found there. In these circumstances no structure would be safe from the destroying hands of the Arabs. It has been thought that the monument dates from not later than the first century of our era, and that therefore this Odainatus was not the warrior husband of the famous Zenobia, ruler of Palmyra. The Odainatus known to history was in these parts; and there is nothing impossible in the

supposition that the glories of the campaign may have been dimmed for the chivalrous soldier by the death of his sweet companion, ere the star of Zenobia arose in the heaven of his love. This would bring the date down past the middle of the third century. The conjecture is so far supported by the presence of the inscription in Palmyrene. Withal it is the most interesting of all the remains of the past now to be seen in *Suweida* and its neighbourhood.

Descending the steep bank, we crossed by an ancient bridge the little stream that flows in the bottom of the ravine. With the advance of summer this stream soon vanishes, and the town becomes entirely dependent for water supply on reservoir and cistern. At the gate of the town we found a little guide who conducted us to the post-office. The quarters occupied as imperial post and telegraph office would horrify the humblest of our Western officials. We scrambled over several dunghills and broken walls, and but for the telegraph wires it would have been impossible to distinguish the "office" from a number of rude cattle-shelters around. The *ma'mûr*, or official in charge, was all politeness and courtesy. Learning that a mail was about to be despatched to the north, we set about writing pencil-notes to our friends, while the *ma'mûr*, business being slack, engaged in a conversation by telegraph with his brother operator in Damascus, securing for us information on several points of importance. The amount of telegraphing thus done for the friends of the *ma'mûrîn* in Syria would not be readily credited in the West. A

message is sent to bring one to the office, when, if nothing special is on hand, he may hold a long conversation on any subject with his friend or man of business at a distance. These *ma'mûrîn* in Syria are almost all Christians, Moslems possessing the requisite qualifications in linguistic attainments and intelligence being seldom available. This speaks volumes for the system of education inaugurated and carried on chiefly by the missionaries, of which as yet few Moslems have taken advantage. The position of clerk in very many of the various Government departments is also occupied by Christians. Moslems in the country are, however, slowly awakening to realise the advantages of education, and are seeking in greater numbers than ever to avail themselves of opportunities hitherto despised.

The Druze sheikh of the town, who was also *kaim makâm*, or lieutenant-governor of the district, we found in his own house near the top of the quarter at present inhabited. He was in sore distress over the apparently hopeless illness of his son, a lad of some twenty summers, who sat suffering among his friends. The room was crowded in every part by relatives and friends, who had come from far and near to show their sympathy in the hour of trial. Anything more completely opposed to all humane and civilised ideas of the conditions that ought to prevail in a sick-room it is impossible to imagine. The air was foul with many breaths, and laden with the fumes of tobacco, in which all seemed to indulge, conversation being carried on in manner and tone suggestive of the

public market; the dying youth, meanwhile, utterly wearied of the noise and confusion, with difficulty attracted attention to have his few wants supplied. It must not be thought that this conduct was the result of exceptional thoughtlessness on the part of the sheikh's sympathisers. It was all done in obedience to custom, whose requirements are far more stringent than those of written law in this country. The man whose sick-room is not crowded with hosts of sympathising friends is held in but little respect. To refrain from mingling with the crowd and adding a quota to the hubbub is to prove lack of all interest in the case. So firmly is the custom rooted, that the energetic efforts of enlightened medical men in many parts have as yet produced almost no appreciable result. We long for quiet in our time of trial, and true friends jealously guard against intrusion upon our grief. Here trial and sorrow must alike be borne practically in presence of the public. When death enters a household the place is literally taken possession of by so-called sympathising friends; and their well-meant endeavours to divert the thoughts of the mourners from their loss must nearly always have the effect of deepening the woe they are intended to alleviate.

The sheikh's house, less squalid perhaps than most in the town, was built around a paved courtyard, entered from the street by an imposing doorway. One large room had also a door opening upon the street, approached by a flight of steps. Here we were entertained with coffee. As a Government

official who had received instructions from his superiors to receive the travellers with all courtesy, the sheikh bore himself with no little dignity; and only the haste of our departure prevented his making a larger display of hospitality. The *diwân* of the sheikh stands on the opposite side of the street a little lower down, on the site of an ancient temple. Many of the columns which once surrounded the latter are standing still, but serve only to cast a dreary air of departed glory over the place. A few paces farther down, the street is spanned by a triumphal arch, of Roman workmanship. This street is paved throughout. We visited, in rapid succession, the remains of a church, of a mosque, and of a building called by the natives *el-Mehkemeh*—"the court of justice." All of these are in a completely ruinous condition. *Suweida* offers a rich field for inscription-seekers. Only he who would make thorough work must be prepared for risks and unpleasantnesses,—in hanging, for example, over the top of a rickety doorway to read an inscription placed upside down, or in creeping into holes and cellars where one's attention is almost entirely absorbed in the important but well-nigh impossible process of breathing. Here are also the remains of a nymphaeum and aqueduct dating from the time of Trajan. Two large reservoirs afford the chief supply of water, there being no fountains in or near the town. These are built round with solid masonry, and the water is reached by means of stone stairs. When the summer is well advanced, it must require a stout heart and no little

usage to enable one to conquer a natural repugnance to the unwholesome liquid collected in these reservoirs. I imagine that the memory of the oldest man does not carry him back to the time when they were last cleaned. The larger of the two is called *Birket el-Hajj*—"Pool of the Pilgrimage." The *Hajj* road to Mecca once passed by way of *Suweida*, and from this reservoir the pilgrims drank. Mohammed Said Pasha, when chief of the pilgrimage, changed the route, finding the way by the western side of the plain less liable to annoyance by the robber Arabs. Such reservoirs, more or less preserved and protected by guards against other use, stand at intervals all along the great *Hajj* road to Mecca.

What *Suweida* was in the far past no one can tell; the very name of the ancient city seems irrevocably lost. But, judging from the magnitude of the ruins, it must have played no unimportant part in the history of the country. An ancient local tradition asserts that Job was the first *emîr* or prince of *Suweida*. It is to this day what we may call the capital of *Jebel ed-Druze*, the sheikh being, as we have seen, not merely chief of the town, but also lieutenant-governor of the district under the Turks. The appointment of one of themselves as *kaim makâm* represents one side of the Turkish policy in its endeavour to gain the mastery over these free-spirited and warlike people. The man chosen in this instance was one whose name, if any, would carry weight with his nation. But even the son of the famous *Isma'îl el-'Atrash* could hardly render himself acceptable to

the Druzes in the ungracious task of tax-collecting —the chief function of the Turkish official. The other side of the policy has long been familiar to the world, the method of setting rival factions and races against each other, fomenting their quarrels, fanning their animosities, until they are so weakened by mutual conflict that Turkey can step in without much trouble and lay an iron hand on all. Of this more anon. There have been stirring times since our visit.

We took a straight line across country for *'Iry*, a village crowning a low hill some two hours' distant from *Suweida*. The land is open and diversified, hill and valley in pleasant succession relieving the monotony of the plain. The soil is rich, and in this part the Druzes use it well. Their skill in evading the iniquitous exactions of the Government doubtless accounts partly for their industry. No one cares to do his best to raise crops of which he knows he will be systematically robbed ; but the Druzes generally display a commendable diligence compared with most other inhabitants of Syria. *Jebel ed-Druze*, with its neat gardens and trim vineyards creeping over the slopes, more closely resembles Mount Lebanon than any other district in the country. With the advantages conferred by the arrangements made for the government of the Lebanon after the fearful scenes of 1860, of which recent corrupt governors have been unable wholly to deprive the inhabitants, such progress has been made in education, agriculture, and generally in the arts of civilisation, in spite of the wild and sterile character of much of their country, as to inspire hope

for the rest of Syria when the time comes, as surely it soon must now, to deliver her from the oppressions of the Turk. A little over half-way, a large building to the right of our path, with the Turkish flag floating over it, would have served as a reminder had we been disposed to forget that we were not beyond the reach of His Imperial Majesty's arms.

Arrived at *'Iry*, we took up our position on the bank of a little stream, which was full to the brim with cool water. Fruit trees grew profusely around, and lent us grateful shade. Forming a circle on the grass, we discussed the contents of our luncheon-bags with all the relish of a picnic-party. We had not rested long when a messenger arrived from the sheikh, bearing his salutations, together with a load of substantial viands. The chief was engaged with a company of brother sheikhs from various districts in *Haurân*, and could not come himself; but having seen the strangers seating themselves in the grove, he sought to maintain the tradition of Eastern hospitality by sending to us of the best—milk, *leban*, cheese, bread, honey, and, above all, delicious fresh butter, the first we had seen in our travels. How delightfully refreshing these were that hot noontide, with rustling leaves overhead and rippling water at our feet, it is needless to say. When we rode up to express our obligations to the worthy sheikh, he and his companions received us with great cordiality. He also is a son of the celebrated *Isma'îl el-'Atrash*, brother of the lieutenant-governor of *Suweida*. The younger, he is also much the larger man of the two. His frame is well built



SHEYÛKH ED-DRUZE (COUNCIL OF WAR)

and in good proportion. When dressed in his state robes of barbaric splendour, and girt with his golden-hilted sword, he appeared quite a king among men. The assembled *sheyûkh* had gathered from all the district between *'Iry* and *Salkhad*—the fortress on the mountain, marking the most easterly boundary of Israel's possession—and they formed a company of chiefs such as it is a piece of rare good fortune for any traveller to see. The doctor produced his camera, in which all were immediately interested. After most of them had peeped into it, and, to their great amusement, had seen their fellows upside down, they were in the best of humour, and anxious to have their portraits taken. This, of course, was what the doctor wanted; and the result was one of the finest plates in his possession, presenting a striking group of men, not one commonplace in appearance.

The present village of *'Iry* is insignificant, but ruins covering a wide area prove it to have been an important place in early times. A suggestion has recently been made that here Jephthah, judge of Israel, was buried. The statement that he was buried "in the cities of Gilead" has always presented a difficulty, which the rabbis have sought to explain by the invention of a story which even they would find it difficult to equal in absurdity. According to the rabbis, Jephthah brought on himself divine displeasure, because he persisted in carrying out his dreadful vow, although he knew this to be contrary to God's desire, and an official existed in Israel part of whose stated duty it was to relieve men from vows

which ought not to be performed. God therefore smote him with a terrible disease. As commander-in-chief of the armies of Israel, he went on a tour of inspection through the fortresses of Gilead. Just then the fell disease wrought havoc in his frame, which died piecemeal. The parts were buried where they fell, as he moved on in his chariot. Thus in his burial he was distributed through "the cities of Gilead"! The consonants in the Hebrew word translated "cities" correspond exactly to the Arabic consonants in the name *'Iry*. If, as seems not impossible, this place was within the borders of the district then designated by the term "Gilead," the suggested identification is almost certainly correct, and we should read that Jephthah was buried "in 'Iry of Gilead."

'Iry in its present form owes its existence to the above-mentioned *Isma'îl el-'Atrash*, who made it his headquarters, and in the early part of the nineteenth century wielded a potent influence over the whole province. He was a man who, in favourable circumstances, might have taken rank with the world's great generals. Combining distinguished courage, determination, and military skill with a genius for administration and the management of men, he secured a position of practical independence of the Turkish Government, and was able to make his own terms with the *Beduw* who visit that region. It was customary, indeed, for men from the desert who wished to go to Damascus to obtain permission to pass through his dominions. The fact that these

proud-spirited Arabs submitted to this interference with their ancient and hereditary privileges is enough in itself to prove the dread in which his displeasure was held. With statesmanlike regard for the well-being of the country, he planned a system of irrigation, and was able, before his death, partly to carry out his project, capturing the rills on the mountains, and leading them, through artificial channels, in every direction. The stream by which we had lunch owed to this arrangement its unusual volume of water—strong enough, even at this season, to turn a mill which stood nearer the village. He also encouraged the planting of olives and fruit trees, and the grove which afforded us shelter was one result of his praiseworthy public spirit and enterprise.

When *Isma'îl el-'Atrash* died, none of his sons displayed capacity at all equal to that of their father. Each had a village given him, of which he became sheikh; but no one arose to fill the old man's place in the respect and awe of the people. To restore the prestige of their house, these sons appear to have entered into an alliance with the Turks, accepting positions as subordinates of the Government which their heroic father had defied, trusting to their great name to protect them against suspicion of treachery among the Druzes. It was a step pregnant with disaster alike for themselves and for their people.

As we here take leave of the towns and villages of the Druzes, we may look for a little at the faith, the character, and recent history of this strange people in these parts.

CHAPTER VII

The Druzes—Their religion—Their character—Druze and Jew—Recent history in *Haurân*—Druze and Bedawy—War.

The Druzes are generally known by a name which is not of their own choosing, nor, indeed, is it at all to their liking. "Druze" seems to connect them with Durazy, any close relation with whom they disclaim. Had they their own way, they would be called *Muwahhedîn*, the Arabic equivalent for Unitarians. In this fact we have the key to their distinctive character; for they are essentially a people gathered round a religious idea. This possessed sufficient force to separate them from the first from all surrounding peoples, and made necessary a mutual bond, or alliance, offensive and defensive, among the members of the new society, in order to secure its existence. In due time the society grew into a distinct people, of marvellous cohesion and power of united action against all outsiders. To understand this people, we must know something of their faith.

The sect took its rise in the early years of the eleventh century, during the reign of *Caliph el-Hâkim Biamrillah*, in Egypt (996-1020). A foolish and dis-

sipated prince, his minister, *ed-Durazy*, for reasons not now obvious, proclaimed him to be an incarnation of Deity, the last of the long line of incarnations extending from Adam downward. The people of Cairo, however, would have none of his doctrines. Escaping the violence of the mob whom his blasphemies had enraged, he fled to Syria, where, among the mountains of Southern Lebanon, he found asylum for himself, and disciples to accept his teaching. It is, indeed, not darkly hinted that his efforts to enlighten the Syrians were ably seconded by the persuasive powers of Egyptian gold, the worthy *el-Hâkim* being no way indisposed to undergo the process of apotheosis while it was possible for him to enjoy its honours. The work of *ed-Durazy* might have proved only transitory in its effects, had not a learned and able Persian, *Hamzeh* by name, come to his assistance. By a skilful combination of *ed-Durazy's* new dogma with ancient superstitions and mystical doctrines, frowned upon by orthodox Mohammedans, he wrought out a religious system which commanded the respect and secured the submission of increasing numbers.

The great doctrine of *Islâm*, the unity of the Godhead, is almost violently emphasised in the Druze religion ; but this is associated with a belief in God's close relation to the world and His eternal love for men, in so far as it is possible to attribute love to a being of whom only one thing can be certainly predicated, namely, existence. This love has resulted in a constant succession of incarnations or manifestations of Himself since the beginning. Therefore all the great

prophetic line, from Adam to Jesus Christ, are held in reverence. A place is also accorded to *Mohammed*; and, further, the divine is seen in *'Ali, Mohammed ibn Isma'îl, Sa'id el-Mûhdi,* and, last and greatest, *el-Hâkim.* With regard to this last, death is not to be thought of as terminating his earthly career; it is only a change, to test the faith and sincerity of his followers. One day he will return with invincible might, to bring the whole world into subjection. Of Jesus Christ it is interesting to observe that the Druze agrees with the Mohammedan in believing that the divine incarnation was not put to death; but, while the latter says that His "appearance" was crucified, the former holds that a second Jesus Christ, son of the carpenter, endured the dread penalty, while Jesus Christ, the manifestation of the Divine, passed scathless from the world. In all of this it is not difficult to trace the influence of early Christian heresy.

The Druzes believe in the transmigration of souls. It has been erroneously held that they receive this doctrine in a modified form, not thinking it possible that a human soul should enter one of the lower animals. This is not so. At the very moment of his mother's death, a calf was born in the herd of a Druze, and he firmly believed that the soul of his mother dwelt in that calf. Along with this, they believe in a series of human lives for the individual in different forms. No man knows if in the first youth he meets he may not salute the spirit of his grandfather. The destination of the soul on parting from the body is determined by the manner in which

it has lived: if well, it will be born again in happier conditions; if ill, its next existence will be fraught with pain and sorrow. It is an article of their faith that births do not increase, deaths do not diminish, the actual number of Druzes in existence. That number is known to God only, but it is fixed and unchangeable forever. Birth brings not a new spirit into being, but only begins a new life for one already existing. Death does not slay a spirit, but only introduces the living into a new form of existence. No one born of true Druze parentage can ever become anything else, and no one born of Christian or other parents can ever become a Druze.

It would be a mistake to suppose that all Druzes are acquainted with the whole system of their religion. It would be nearer truth to say that very many know nothing of religion at all. The deeper things are high secrets, which only the *'Akkâl*—men and women of understanding—are given to know. Their place of worship is called *Khalweh* ("retired spot"), and there the initiated conduct their secret service. Many years ago, during the troubles that have so often convulsed this country, the sacred books of the Druzes were seized and studied by competent scholars; but, like the Freemasons, whom they so much resemble, the Druzes may very well maintain that there are secrets among them which no books can ever reveal. Certain it is that round these repositories of their mysteries the *Juhhâl*, or ignorant ones, gather with profound veneration. The *'Akkâl* bear themselves with great circumspection.

They live sober and temperate lives, abstaining from all alcoholic liquors, from tobacco, and even from coffee, the universal beverage of the Arab.

Hamzeh, who systematised their doctrines and gave something like coherency to their beliefs, they continue to honour as *el-Hâdi* ("the guide"). *Durazy*, strangely, they have forgotten, or remember only to repudiate. *El-Hâdi* is from the same root, and has the same meaning, as *el-Mahdi*, the expected "guide" of the Moslems, who is to "lead" them to the universal triumph for which they yearn.

The Druzes number in all perhaps something over a hundred thousand. They do not, however, for a moment believe that all real Druzes are confined to Syria. China, for example, is a land of which they have some dim knowledge; it figures vague and vast in their untutored minds. They have heard that there are beliefs common to them and the Chinese; this is sufficient to create the conviction that the Chinese are really Druzes too, whatever name they may be called, and that, when the proper time comes, that mighty empire will pour forth its millions to do battle in the cause of *el-Hâkim*. The British share, in this regard, their affection and confidence, an impression prevailing widely that they too are a nation of Druzes. If this impression did not come from the kindly treatment of the Druzes by the British, when, after the massacre, they were in imminent danger, it was certainly strengthened thereby. If one of them asks how many Druzes there are in England, and receives the reply that

there are none, he is far from being convinced, and most likely he leaves you with the suspicion that you are a Druze yourself. He will think nothing the less of you for your stout denial; for it is permitted to them to assume the outward form and profession of any religion whatever, if their welfare for the time may thereby be promoted, the only condition being that they remain true in heart to the faith of their fathers. In a country where the people excel in clever deceptions, it is often extremely hard for the missionary to distinguish between the true and the spurious convert. There is a well-authenticated case in which a Druze professed conversion to Christianity, was baptized, received into the Church, and, having given proof of his fitness, was at length ordained to the ministry. He continued to exercise his calling with acceptance for several years; then, throwing off the mask by which he had deceived everybody, he openly declared that he was a Druze at heart, and had never been anything else.

The Lebanon for long was the home of the Druzes, but now they are found as far north as Antioch and as far south as Carmel; while since 1860 they have gone eastward, and settled in such numbers on the mountain, that the name *Jebel Haurân*, by which it was formerly known, is fast giving place to that of *Jebel ed-Druze*. Wherever the Druze goes, he maintains his well-earned reputation for hospitality and kindly treatment of strangers. This practice is mixed up with the religious ideas that from hoary antiquity have prevailed from the eastern

shore of the Mediterranean throughout the whole Arabian peninsula. The guest is in some sense the representative of God, by whose bounty all men live. The traveller who finds himself belated near a habitation of Druzes may generally go forward with good heart, assured that the best of their poor store will be placed ungrudgingly at his disposal. Alongside of this pleasing feature in their character there are others not less prominent, but hardly so attractive. They have a reputation for extreme sensitiveness to insult or injury, excessive vindictiveness, and perfect fearlessness in the exaction of revenge. As may be supposed, therefore, the blood feud among them is a stern reality, and the function of the avenger of blood a solemn obligation. Should an opportunity not come soon for the achievement of their purpose, they can wait with grim patience; and it will be found, in the end, that years have not abated one jot the fury of their desire for vengeance. With this inflexible resolution to take the life of an enemy for the life of a friend, there coexists an equally binding duty to protect a brother Druze who may have shed blood unwittingly or otherwise—to hide him from pursuers, and defend his life with their own. If the avenger's claim can be settled by payment of money—a mode of settlement not uncommon—the sum to be paid is a tax upon the whole community.

Comparisons are often instituted between the various peoples in the country, in respect of their courage and prowess in the field of battle. By common consent the Druzes and the *Beduw* receive

the highest places. In simple daring and personal intrepidity in sudden attack, the *Beduw* excel; but in determined courage, power of united action, and stubborn endurance in the face of a powerful foe, they must yield the palm to the Druzes. While we cannot but admire the wild bravery of the Bedawy, it is clear that the qualities possessed by the Druze are more to be desired in the hour of conflict. There is a strain of true nobility in the character of that people who in the hour of victory have ever chivalrously protected defenceless women and little children from all injury and insult.

An interesting parallel might be drawn between the ancient Israelites and the modern Druzes. The latter cannot indeed trace their descent from a single *jadd*, or ancestor, as the former did from Abraham. They are of mixed parentage, the old Syrian element probably predominating. Passing from this, we find that the impulse separating both from surrounding peoples was religious; their isolation is preserved by devotion to the national religious idea. Both are essentially theocracies; their idea of a "state," if we may so use the term, would be that of "the church acting civilly." The central doctrine with both is the unity of God. Their national aspirations are strikingly similar. Israel aspired to universal dominion as the people of God; the Druzes aspire to nothing less. The hope of Israel was in the coming of the *Messiah*; that of the Druzes, in the return of *el-Hâkim.* If we take the Jewish conception of the work of the Messiah prevalent at the time of Christ, and substitute

the name of *el-Hâkim* for *Messiah*, and Druzes for Jews, we have very accurately the Druze conception of the work of *el-Hâkim*, the coming conqueror. In both a marvellous unity has been preserved through long generations; and each, in feature and dress, is easily distinguishable from all others.

Although widely scattered, their organisations are perfect. The community touched at any point feels through all. The sheikhs of the *'Akkâl*, as leaders of the religious commonwealth, perform functions corresponding in some degree to those of the old Hebrew judges and prophets. At their word the hosts gather from far and near, place themselves under the command of chosen chiefs, and go forth to warfare. They also convene solemn councils for the discussion of weighty matters of religion or policy. But gatherings for such purposes without other ostensible object would attract more attention than is desirable. Advantage is therefore taken of ordinary occasions which call for the presence of friends, more especially funerals, when men gather "frae a' the airts" and transact the necessary business. Doubtless the company of chiefs we saw at *'Iry* was convened to discuss the special circumstances in which they were then placed, and to arrange for concerted action in the immediate future. Presenting a united front to the outside world, had they been equally at one among themselves, they might ere now have played a distinguished part in the affairs of the East. But the ambitions of rival families have sundered them; their attention has been engaged with domestic

broils, their energies frittered away in the quarrels of factions, when they might and ought to have been preparing themselves to make a broad mark in the military history of their country. It is precisely in knowing how skilfully to fan such internal fires, and excite domestic strife that the Turkish Government has proved its ability to keep such peoples in hand. How like the case of the Jews, when the bands of iron were closing upon them!

Until recently the Government has had very little power in the *Haurân*; and if its power to-day is more than nominal, past history forbids the belief that it will now prove permanent. The chief military stations are *Sheikh Sa'ad*, the seat of the governor; *Busr el-Harîry*, on the southern border of *el-Lejâ'*; and *Suweida*. There is also a small force in the fortress at *Bosra Eski Shâm*. While fighting has been done, the position was not won by arms in the usual sense. The old policy has been pursued. The various sections of the people have been played off against each other with great adroitness, and, on the whole, with success. The common enemy, ever on the alert for advantage, calmly appropriated the territory of victor and vanquished alike.

The Druzes and the *Beduw* bear each other no love. Nothing was easier than to breed bad blood between them. They could not have played into the hands of the Government more thoroughly, had that been their design, than by weakening each other in internecine strife. The Government claimed from the Druzes a certain tax; but, as mentioned above,

they were willing to do anything rather than pay it, and up till recently the Government did not see its way to enforce payment. Things began to look more hopeful, and the secession of the *'Atrash* family inspired the belief that taxes and all arrears might be collected. They had not reckoned with the proud, unbending spirit of the Druze nation. A Solomon might be submitted to; a band of Rehoboams, never. The demand for arrears, accompanied by an implied threat, met with the response one might have expected from these fiery mountaineers. The sheikhs of the house of *'Atrash* had to seek asylum under the wing of the Government in Damascus. This was a bold bid of defiance which no government could afford to ignore. Exact information as to succeeding events is extremely difficult to obtain, but what follows may be taken as a fairly accurate account, as far as it goes.

We visited the district in April 1890. There was an evident alertness in all the bearing of the men. We could descry numerous figures on walls and roofs long before we reached any place of importance; and, coming nearer, we saw that our approach was eagerly watched until our peaceful appearance satisfied the sentinels. The fact was that even then affairs had taken an unpleasant turn; and only ten days after we passed the seceding sheikhs had to flee for their lives, and the Government resorted to arms to quell "the rebellion," as it was called. On their part the Druzes, under popular chiefs, cheerfully prepared for the fray.

The Government troops, under *Memdûh Pasha*, military and civil governor of *Haurân*, assembled in the neighbourhood of *Busr el-Harîry*. *Memdûh* sent to the rebel chiefs, calling upon them to surrender. In reply, a deputation of the chiefs themselves came to him by night, made strong protestations of loyalty, and affected not to understand why they should be classed as rebels; they were true friends to the sultan, and wished prosperity to his Government. *Memdûh* was not deceived. He required that they should come with their friends in open day and formally make their submission. They could hardly have expected to persuade the pasha of their loyalty. Probably they hoped by their visit only to gain knowledge of the strength of the enemy and the purposes of the leader. In any case, they did not come back, but sent instead an insulting message, which reminds one of Goliath of Gath's challenge to the youthful David. They declared themselves ready to receive him; and if he had courage to come, they promised to make mincemeat of him and his soldiers. "Come, O Memdûh," they said, "and we will give thy body to be chopped into small pieces!" The pasha simply replied, "The loyal will receive honour; the rebel must take the consequences of his conduct." The soldiers advanced towards *Suweida*, which they found almost deserted. Several merchants from Damascus were taken into the market and made prisoners on suspicion of supplying the rebels with munitions of war. The Druzes meantime had taken up a strong natural position among their rocky

fortresses. The soldiers advancing upon them were unable to sustain the Druze fire, being completely exposed, while the latter were as completely covered among the rocks. One of the first to fall was the son of one of the *'Atrash* sheikhs, who was recognised and shot by a Druze marksman. Thus early and dearly did they pay for their defection.

The attack was relinquished until reinforcements came bringing several light field-pieces. Meantime one of the Druze sheikhs, who had received some injury, real or imaginary, had taken one of the terrible oaths in which the history of the East abounds, invoking upon himself the most awful curses, both in this world and in the next, if he slew not *Memdûh Pasha* with the edge of the sword. In renewing the attack the pasha had recourse to an ancient stratagem of which the Druzes ought to have been aware. He planted the field-pieces at some distance in the rear, behind a little eminence. A party with definite instructions was sent forward. On their approach the Druzes opened fire. The soldiers wavered, broke, and fled. The defenders, believing this to be a real defeat, waxed bolder, and left their rocks to pursue, hoping to turn defeat into a rout. The soldiers simply retired behind the cannon, and immediately fire was opened on the now unprotected Druzes with murderous effect. The issue of the battle was not one moment in doubt; but many were the displays of individual bravery and personal prowess, which shall be related by children's children, to fan the flame of patriotism in the bosom of youth; to beguile the

tedium of the winter days, and enliven the hours of rest from toil among the mountains. One Druze who rode a fine horse charged literally past the cannon's mouth, slew the gunner with his sword, captured the musket of the fallen soldier, and dashed back, amid a rain of bullets, like one bearing a charmed life. This exploit he repeated three times, inspiring his foes with dread. Yet a fourth time he spurred his charger to the attack. This time he came in the line of fire; but a soldier who had followed him was now between him and the cannon, and the gunner hesitated. "It matters not! Fire!" roared the officer in command, quaking for his own safety. The piece was fired: soldier and Druze hero entered eternity together.

The sheikh who had sworn to slay the pasha saw where the commander stood, and, turning thither, rushed forward wildly, brandishing his sword and hoarsely shouting, "*Il yaum yaumak, ya Memdûh; ya Memdûh, il yaum tamût!*"—"This is thy day, O Memdûh! O Memdûh, to-day thou shalt die!" Thus threatened, the ranks closed around the general, but the dauntless chief cared not; he would hew down all opposition until the object of his wrath was reached. Nor was his an idle boast. In his fierce onslaught six stalwart soldiers fell beneath his keen blade, and he had even penetrated to the very inmost ring of the pasha's guard ere he was arrested by sheer weight of wounds piled upon him from every side. He would have died cheerfully had the pasha's blood mingled with his own. He had almost touched his

enemy when the waters of the river of death rose over him and he sank forever. One who stood by severed his head from the trunk with a blow of his sword, and, casting the bleeding horror at the pasha's feet, exclaimed, "Thus perish all thine enemies, O thine excellency, and those of our glorious sultan!"

Of the numbers who fell on either side we shall probably never obtain complete information. Suffice it to say that the Druzes suffered so heavily as to be practically at the mercy of their conquerors. The latter showed a disposition to take full advantage of their success and exact "the last farthing" of their claims. The Druzes were in despair. It seemed, indeed, as if only ruin were before them. Through the kindly mediation of European consular agents, an arrangement was come to which saved the vanquished from the worst consequences of defeat. Compromise was all the Druzes could now hope for, and they gained more than the most sanguine could have anticipated. Arrears were not to be demanded, and they agreed to pay a tax of about half the amount originally imposed. They were, however, required to receive again the sheikhs of the house of *'Atrash*. On these conditions they might return and dwell in safety, all prisoners taken in war being restored to them. One other condition it must have been hard to accept. They were to be prohibited from carrying arms, save by special licence obtained from the Turkish officials. But they could not well reject terms proposed to them by their mediators and accepted by their conquerors. Thus it happened that

where every man one met was loaded with instruments of death, soon almost the only weapon to be seen, save in the hands of soldiers, was the shepherd's "club," or *naboot*, with which the very poor all over the land are wont to defend themselves and attack their foes; and a formidable weapon it is in practised hands.

The Government naturally sought to secure the advantage thus gained. The importance attaching to *Suweida* as the key to *Jebel ed-Druze* became apparent. Preparations were immediately begun for the erection of a *kal'at*, or fortress, there, by means of which the turbulent spirits might be overawed. Thus another step is taken towards the subjugation of all that district to Ottoman rule. There is no need to suppose that the Druzes acquiesce calmly and finally in this condition of things. It is as certain as anything mundane can be that they simply "bide their time," and when that time comes, their old, proud, freedom-loving spirit will assert itself again, undimmed and unbroken.

CHAPTER VIII

Bozrah—First Syrian mosque—The physician the reconciler—The "House of the Jew"—The great mosque—Cufic inscription—Boheira and Mohammed—The fortress—Bridal festivities—Feats of horsemanship—History—Origen's visit—Capture by Moslems.

A Druze peasant who accompanied us part of the way from *'Iry* to *Bozrah* professed to know the country well throughout a wide area, and declared that he could conduct us to a hundred ruins, south and east of *Bozrah*, as great and beautiful as *Bozrah* itself. This was exaggeration, of course; but that district beyond *Umm el-Jamâl* is still unexplored, and we regretted much that we could not accept his proffered guidance. Ere descending into the *Wady Zeideh*, we came in full view of *Bozrah*, spreading darkly under a light haze on the plain beyond, like the ruins of a great city that had passed through fire. The massive castle of *Salkhad* had long been visible, sitting proudly on the very crest of the giant ridge of *Jebel ed-Druze*, commanding a wide prospect over all the land of Bashan, and far over the inhospitable deserts eastward. The sheikh whom we met at *'Iry* pressingly invited us, and fain were we to go and stand upon the most easterly border of the land held



PLATE XII. BAB EL-HOWA

by ancient Israel. As this could not be, we satisfied ourselves for the time by gazing at the fine old fortress through the telescope. It forms a magnificent landmark. With this grand old stronghold, and the volcanic cone of *Jebel el-Kuleib*, just above *Suweida*, towering high over all, the traveller in the plains need be at no loss to discover his whereabouts. Some of the villages to the right are inhabited by Christians, between whom and their Druze neighbours there is nearly always strife.

Approaching *Bozrah* from the north, just outside the town, we reach a mosque called *el-Mebrak*—"the place of kneeling." Here knelt the camel which bore the Kor'ân before *Othman ibn 'Affan*, third caliph after Mohammed, on his entering Syria. This determined the spot where the first Syrian mosque should stand. On a basaltic slab within is shown the alleged impression made by the kneeling camel. The house where Mohammed should alight in Medina when he fled from Mecca was indicated by the kneeling of his *naqa*, or female camel; and there was raised the first Mohammedan mosque in the world. This method of selecting particular spots by the kneeling of the camel is illustrated among other Eastern peoples; for example, among the Jews. They say that Maimonides, the great doctor of the twelfth century, gave instructions, before his death, that he should be laid to rest in the Holy Land. His body was laid on a camel, which, starting from Alexandria, marched day and night until it reached a spot outside the walls of Tiberias. There it kneeled

down. With difficulty it was made to rise, but it only moved round in a narrow circle. The phenomenon roused the interest of the spectators. Inquiring, they found that the great doctor's father was buried there; and they laid his body in his father's grave!

Our tents were pitched under the shadow of the castle, on a threshing-floor, still green with the grass of spring. Our first visitor was a Christian, one of *Bozrah's* few inhabitants, whose mouth was full of blasphemies against the Druzes. A companion had received a gunshot wound in a recent skirmish, and now they were plotting revenge. The governor's letter secured for us a kindly welcome from the officer commanding the garrison, who invited us to drink coffee with him and go over the old castle. It was already known throughout the mountain that we should not move till Monday. Early on Saturday the Druzes began to gather from *Salkhad*, *Kerîyeh*, and other villages. A second company of fellahîn from the neighbourhood at the same time assembled at our camp. Their mutual enmities were laid aside or forgotten. Their one anxiety was to get a word of the good *hakîm*, who might help them in their sickness, or give such advice as might relieve relatives and friends too ill to come themselves. These groups of men, but yesterday, perhaps, engaged in loud quarrels, wounding each other in wrath, now gathered peacefully together, docile as lambs in the hands of the man whom they felt they could trust, formed a striking scene, not soon to be forgotten.

Nor can one fail to see what a powerful mediator and reconciler one true representative of the Great Physician among these wild peoples might prove.

Most of the remains of interest are gathered in little space near the crossing of the two main streets, which, as in all the Roman cities we visited, cut the city at right angles. Triumphal arch, baths, tall Corinthian columns with beautiful capitals still in position, and the remains of an old temple lie closely together. Going from the crossing towards the great mosque, we pass an old doorway, all that now remains of what the Arabs call *Beit el-Yehûdy*—"House of the Jew." *'Omâr*, second from Mohammed, was and is justly celebrated for the impartiality of his judgments. Tradition saith that during his reign the Moslem governor of *Bozrah* ruined this Jewish house and built a mosque on the site. The oppressed Jew made his way to Medina, where he found the caliph surrounded by neither pomp nor circumstance that could daunt the poorest client. Hearing his case, *'Omâr* gave him an order, written on the jawbone of an ass, which he found to his hand. Immediately on receiving this order, the governor of *Bozrah* directed the mosque to be pulled down and the Jew's house rebuilt and restored to him. Such an incident should be remembered with pride by all worthy Moslems, as illustrating the purity of their early rulers. On the contrary, the Jew who sought simple justice is held as "an execration, and an astonishment, and a reproach." The inquirer will seek long and diligently

ere he find such lofty principle among the judges of *Islâm* to-day.

The great mosque, tradition says, was built by order of *'Omâr*. Old materials have been freely used in its construction. The court within is adorned with marble columns. These and many stones in the walls bear Greek inscriptions, often sadly mutilated—evidence enough of the antiquity of the materials; for the Arabs knew no Greek, and were often profoundly irritated because Greek prisoners, from whom they hoped to learn something of the enemy, knew no Arabic. One column, bearing in an inscription the Saviour's name, was doubtless taken from a Christian church. For the building of this latter, in turn, it was probably brought from a heathen temple, more ancient still. The column immediately east of this bears the date 383 Bostrian era = A.D. 489. Only traces remain of the frieze and ornamentation in Cufic and Arabic characters—the adornment chiefly affected by the Moslems. The minaret commands a beautiful view of the surrounding country, but its rickety appearance deterred us from the ascent. The centre of the mosque is filled with debris. Long deserted, its silent court and ruined walls mutely illustrate the decay which ever swiftly follows the advancing shadow of *Islâm*.

We secured a copy of a long Cufic inscription found on a basaltic slab, by the door of a small mosque. It has been photographed by the American Exploration Society, but I have seen no translation. With the assistance of an intelligent Syrian I went

carefully over it, and I think the following fairly represents the sense. It begins as usual, "In the name of God the merciful, the compassionate," and goes on to enumerate His attributes. He is "the blessed, the opulent, the owner of the world, the just, the incomparable, the invincible, the victorious." It tells of certain properties devoted by one "Serjenk," or "Serjek"—for the name seems spelled both ways—"the humble servant of God," for the benefit of those "who have set free the helpless and friendless from the prisons of infidels, of the widows and orphans of Moslems, of the poor and the sons of the highways," under certain conditions. It concludes with the declaration that whoever infringes these conditions in the future "will do himself injustice, will prove himself an infidel, and partaker in the blood of *Hassan* and *Husein*, and an accomplice of those who do despite to the statutes of God." Then comes the signature—"the humble servant of God, Serjenk."

The church and dwelling-house of *Boheira* are shown here. Of *Boheira* it is said that he was a monk in this city, and was the first to hail the youthful Mohammed as a coming prophet. Of this event, Ockly has translated the following account given by one Basil: "The caravan of the Koreish came by, with which were Kadijah's camels, which were looked after by Mohammed. He [Boheira] looked towards the caravan, in the middle of which was Mohammed; and there was a cloud upon him to keep him from the sun. Then the caravan alighted,

and Mohammed leaning against an old withered tree, it immediately brought forth leaves. Boheira perceiving this, made an entertainment for the caravan, and invited them into the monastery, Mohammed staying behind with the camels. Boheira, missing him, asked if there were all of them. Yes, they said, all but a little boy they had left to look after their things and feed the camels. 'What is his name?' says Boheira. They told him Mohammed ibn 'Abdullah. Boheira asked if his father and mother were not dead, and if he was not brought up by his grandfather and uncle. Being satisfied that it was so, he said: 'O Koreish! set a great value upon him, for he is your lord, and by him will your power be great both in this world and in that to come: for he is your ornament and glory.' They asked him how he knew that. 'Because,' answered Boheira, 'as you were coming, there was never a tree nor a stone nor a clod but bowed itself and worshipped God.' Boheira, besides, told this Basil that a great many prophets had leaned against this tree, and sat under it, but it never bore any leaves before since it was withered. 'And I heard him say,' says this same Basil, 'this is the prophet concerning whom 'Isa [Jesus] spake, Happy is he that believes him, and follows him, and gives credit to his mission.'"

That Mohammed met Boheira seems certain. But exactly what their relations were it is not easy to say. The Syrian Christians believed that he followed "the prophet," and largely assisted him in the composition of his "messages" or "revelations."

They say he supplied the biblical information used for Mohammed's purposes in the Kor'ân. The number of Jews, however, who long ere Mohammed's time had settled in *el-Yemen* suggests a more convenient source for his knowledge, such as it was, of the Torah; but for his acquaintance with Christianity he may possibly have been indebted to some renegade like Boheira. And if his (Boheira's) understanding of the words of Jesus be illustrated in the phrase quoted above, what wonder if his religion did not greatly impress such a mind as Mohammed's! In any case, it was in his Syrian journeys that he must have come into contact with Christianity. However bootless, it is impossible to help regretting that the master mind of the Arabian peninsula should have seen our religion only in the debased form then prevalent in these regions. Had it been ordered otherwise, the whole history of the East might have run in nobler channels.

Close by a second Roman archway stands a large ruined house, abounding in carved and sculptured stones, known as *Kasr-Melek el-Asfar*. At *Zor'a* there is also a "palace of the yellow king."

The fortress is built around and upon the old Roman theatre, which, contrary to expectation in such circumstances, is well preserved. There are vast underground apartments, and cisterns which would supply water for a large garrison through a siege of many months. Subterranean passages, the natives say, lead to a great distance in several directions.

Such an important place as *Bozrah* was bound to claim to be the birthplace of Philip; nor would it be complete without some relation to Job. Accordingly, an "ancient tradition" is forthcoming to the effect that the patriarch dwelt in the country near the city.

On Saturday afternoon we heard the sounds of music and drums proceeding from the town, and high over all the peculiarly shrill, wavering cry uttered by Eastern women in times of excitement, whether of grief or joy. The tramp of horses on the pavement, and the tread of many feet, told of the approach of a procession. Soon a company of horsemen swept into view, youthful, well mounted, armed with the long *rumh*, or Arab spear, accompanied by a crowd of all ages, clad in holiday attire of brilliant colours. Riding in the procession were several little boys, who seemed to have little interest in the affair, and to be, on the whole, not a little bored by it. It was a bridal procession—an occasion of special joy, since not one but four marriages were being celebrated. The enthusiasm lacking on the part of the dressed-up, solemn-looking little bridegrooms was made up for amply by the excited people who surrounded their horses, dancing, singing, shouting, and clapping their hands. A band with drums and timbrels went in front. On the wrists and ankles of the women glittered rude bracelets; heavy rings ornamented their fingers; nor was the nose-jewel entirely absent. Their heads were covered with light kerchiefs of varied hues, the corners tied under the chin, while the hair hung down in long, heavy plaits behind,

often loaded with coins, which might be the dowry of the women who wore them. The men wore the *kufîyeh* and *'akal*—the "kerchief" and "thick hair fillet"—on their heads, with the Arab coat of goats'-hair over their under-garments. Those who were not barefooted wore the common red shoes so dear to the Arab.

The horses pranced and capered. The procession advanced with singing, clapping of hands to the music, and at times in a kind of stately dance. They headed toward a wide stretch of level ground behind our camp. Passing within the enclosure, those on foot drew themselves up along one side; the horsemen dashed forward at full gallop, and began a series of evolutions which, to Western eyes, seemed to involve every man of them in imminent danger. Not a few of the performances in which they pride themselves are obviously cruel to the animals. Riding at full speed, it is a mark of horsemanship to bring the animal to an absolute stop in an instant, throwing him back on his haunches. In starting, he must spring forward at full speed, like an arrow from the bow. If either of these movements cannot be performed, horse or rider, or both, are condemned. In driving the horses peculiar spurs are employed. The bottom of the Arab stirrup is a broad piece of light iron, the hinder part of which is sharpened. When the foot is slipped forward, this piece of iron projects behind the heel. Driven into the sides of the animal, it cuts almost like a knife. And another mark of horsemanship is that these cuts be as far back as

possible. The bridle, too, is an instrument of torture. From the centre of the bit a sharp piece of iron projects inward; a ring attached to the same point drops over the under jaw; the reins are attached to iron rods, which, from the ends of the bit, extend a little way in front of the horse's mouth, forming thus a curb of terrific power. It is with this instrument the rider can arrest his horse in a moment in mid-career. One can hardly help wishing that, for the sake of the poor animal, he had a touch of its quality himself. An exceptionally "hard-mouthed" horse may require exceptional treatment, but the universal employment of this bridle seems gratuitous cruelty.

Many of their feats, however, are very graceful, and in their performance no little skill is required. Their beautiful wheeling and curving on the level, in which horse and rider seem moulded together, remind one of nothing so much as the fine circlings of an expert skater. Good proficiency is attained when the rider can stoop from the saddle at full gallop and pick up his staff from the ground. In this and similar exercises the horseman on the *medân*, or racecourse, is always engaged, in intervals of play. Loud were the challenges of the men of *Bozrah* that festal day, and hearty the responses. Prancing forward, one would touch another with his *rumh*, and, turning, spur his steed and fly, hotly pursued by the man thus challenged. Then ensued a series of evolutions in which all the skill of the horsemen and all the speed of the horses were brought into play. If the pursuer could put his *rumh* on the shoulder of his challenger,

he received the victor's meed of applause; but should the challenger's steed outstrip that of the pursuer, the latter swerved off, and sought to redeem his defeat by a display of skilful horsemanship; and he might count himself fortunate if he reached his place again without a second touch from his conqueror's *rumh.* The play over, the procession formed again, the solemn-looking little men in the centre, as before, marched back to the city with music and dancing, and passed away from our sight. We heard, at intervals, the distant roll of the drums and the shrill cry of the women, from which we knew that the festivities were still going on.

On Sundays more than other days one was impressed with the abnormal quiet reigning over the land. Verily, the word of the Lord has been fulfilled: "And you will I scatter among the nations. . . . Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land, . . . even the rest which it had not in your sabbaths when ye dwelt upon it." Temple, church, and mosque have risen in succession in her cities, have flourished awhile in splendour, then crumbled into ruin. At last the sabbath rest has fallen upon her.

The name *Bozrah* signifies a fortress, and must have described the city from very ancient times. It would be of the highest importance to dwellers in the cultivated lands to have here, on their border, a strong defence against the wild rovers from the deserts. So true is this, that it came to be said, "The prosperity of Bozrah is the prosperity of Haurân."

This city is probably intended by Jeremiah as included in the denunciation of wrath against Moab and all her cities, "far or near." It is mentioned in close connection with *Kerioth* and *Beth Gamul*, which correspond as nearly as may be in name to *Kerîyeh* and *Umm el-Jamâl*—ruined cities in the neighbourhood. *Bozrah* appears in the Apocrypha and Josephus as *Basora*. Hither came the heroic Judas Maccabeus. He delivered from imprisonment many of his unfortunate brethren, and destroyed the city, burning it, as far as that was possible, with fire. But withal there were yet glorious days in store for *Bozrah*. The land passed under the dominion of the Romans. The transjordanic provinces were subdued by Aulus Cornelius Palma. *Bozrah* he made capital of the province, calling it *Nova Trajana Bostra*, in honour of the emperor Trajan. This was in A.D. 105, from which date was reckoned the Bostrian era. The old city took a new lease of life, and worthily assumed her place as by far the most important stronghold east of Jordan. Her streets were graced with public buildings of which the proudest city need not have been ashamed. A network of magnificent roads, which even yet are traced across the plains, leading to all the principal towns and cities in the province, found in her its centre. The merchandise of the East, by way of the road from the Persian Gulf, stocked her marts, and the gold and frankincense caravans from Arabia the Happy brought their stores to increase her wealth. The time of her greatest splendour probably fell in

BOZRAH

the short reign of Philip the Arabian, who, with the wealth of Rome at his command, guided by his Oriental pride and taste, would lavish adornment on the chief city of his native province, embellishing her streets and squares with triumphs of architectural art. Hither came the great Origen, to consult with the Bishop Beryllus, who had gone astray in matters of faith and doctrine; and he met with far greater success than the most doughty warriors for othodoxy may ever hope for, if they regard the heretic as one only to be hunted out and prosecuted. Something might be learned from the methods of Origen, who, in brotherly and friendly converse, convinced the erring bishop, and saved him to the Church. Subsequently the city became the seat of an archbishop. It maintained its fame as a commercial and military centre down to the Mohammedan conquest. *Bozrah* was the first Syrian city invested by the Arabians. The intrepid and skilful soldier, Khâlid, surnamed "The sword of God," commanded the Moslems. While planted before the fortress, the Mohammedans, in the absence of water, performed their ablutions with sand. In the first encounter with Christians outside the walls, the Moslems were entirely victorious. The former shut themselves up in the city, and mounted banners and crosses upon the walls, as if expecting divine intervention, by this means, in their favour. The governor, Romanus, counselling surrender, was deposed as a traitor, and another put in his place. Smarting under the double insult, he resolved to revenge himself by

selling the city to the enemy. Through his treachery many valorous Moslem youths were introduced into the city, in the garb of ordinary citizens, and posted in various quarters. At a given signal, the Moslem war-cry, *Allah Akbar*, resounded over the city. The defenders were thrown into confusion, the inhabitants into consternation and despair. The gates were thrown open, and the city, with little bloodshed, passed into the hands of the Mohammedans, who retain it still. In the days of the Crusades it was still an important stronghold, practically the key to the possession of the eastern provinces. Baldwin III. cast his forces in vain against the rock-like walls. But the blight of *Islâm* had fallen upon it. Gradually its splendour faded ; its well-stocked marts were emptied ; the sound of busy footsteps on its pavements died away ; earthquakes shook down its temples and destroyed its public buildings ; no hand was raised to arrest its decay. And now for centuries it has lain mouldering in mournful ruins under the fierce heat of the Syrian sun, blackening in the breath of Time. But surely her season of solitude and desolation must be nearly over. When the long sabbath of the land is past, new life pulsing in all her furrows, the hills and vales resounding with the song of the husbandman, *Bozrah must* awake from her weary sleep, and put on once again the pleasing garments of prosperity.

CHAPTER IX

Travellers' troubles—A corner of the desert—The mirage—Dangerous *wadies*—Lunch in the desert—A "blind" guide—The clerk to the *sheyûkh*—A mile stone—*Kal'at Esdein*—Thirst—The uplands of Gilead—Search for water—A *Bedawy* camp—Terrific thunderstorm.

Long before dawn on Monday morning all was bustle and stir in the camp. We hoped to reach *Jerash* that evening, but the most conflicting accounts were given of the distance, varying from three days to one long day. The usual road runs west to *Der'at*, where it turns southward by way of *Remtah*. A line direct, across a corner of the desert, is shorter by perhaps fifteen miles. This we proposed to take. In that wide empty land, with never a house, haunted by roving *Bedawe*, a guide was absolutely necessary. With difficulty one was found who had traversed the way before; but he would go only on condition that a friend should also go, to accompany him home again. We were not yet to start, however. A vendor of antiquities entrusted certain old coins, seals, etc., to our cook, who himself did business in that line, in the hope that we might buy. A few purchases were made; but when it came to giving back the remainder, a seal, or stone from a signet ring, was

missing. On this, of course, the owner put a fancy price. Imagine a company of pilgrims on their knees, turning up stones and groping in the dust as earnestly as rag-pickers on a heap! The toil was fruitless. The cook was told that suspicion attached to himself; and that if the seal were not forthcoming, the owner should have his price, the same to be duly deducted from the cook's wages. With an injured air that plainly meant "What shall we hear next?" the worthy *'Abdu* resumed his search, and soon sprang to his feet with the lost seal in his hand. Throwing himself down, he kissed the ground, then casting his eyes upward he fervently exclaimed, *el-hamdulillah*, "Praise be to God!" The owner seemed least pleased of all. Tying up his treasure in the corner of a napkin, he marched sullenly away, grieving doubtless over *'Abdu's* provoking luck.

At last our guide strode off before us, leaving his companion to fetch the muleteers, who, we hoped, might pass us at lunch. We struck the Roman road which runs to the south-west, not that which leads more to the south, past *Umm el-Jamâl* to *Kal'at ez-Zerka.* The pavement on these great highways is hard on the horses' hoofs. The track used to-day almost invariably lies alongside the road. Crossing a shallow vale, we entered a vast plain, covered with tufts of wiry grass. The beautiful iris was here also in plenty. The view offered little variety save on the horizons. *Salchad, Jebel el-Kuleib,* and the dark range of which they are part loomed away on the north-east. Northward lay *el-Lejâ'* and the mountains

that overlook Damascus. The white splendour of Hermon filled the north-western sky. A light haze half-concealed the hills of *Jaulân* and the highlands of Galilee, but nearly due west we could see the round head of Tabor. Before us lay the wooded hills of *Jebel 'Ajlûn*, the land of Gilead, while the plain stretched away to the south-east, desert-wards, as far as the eye could reach.

Several times during this desert ride we saw the *mirage*—now as waving trees, now as dimly outlined houses, with the sheen of water near. Happily we had supplies of water with us, and so were spared the torture these fleeting visions bring to the weary and the thirsty. The mirage is often seen in the plain of *el-Buka'*, or Coele Syria. One most perfect and beautiful I saw in the neighbourhood of *Tell Hûm*, from a roof in Tiberias. It proved to be a picture of Tiberias itself, with ruined castle, broken walls, white-domed mosque, and palm trees, photographed upon the mists some nine miles away.

We crossed several little *wadies* in which the water from winter and spring rains had not quite dried up. The passage of these "brooks" is not always free from danger. The soft soil goes to thick black mud, when saturated with the water of the stream. Several of our party had narrow escapes from accident, the horses sinking to the saddle-girths, and struggling through only with desperate efforts, very unsettling to the riders. In the deepest and broadest of these hollows we found a green-carpeted meadow, with a few *Bedawy* tents. The moment we

came in sight a woman ran out to meet us, with hospitable welcome, bringing a large dish of buttermilk, from which we drank heartily and were refreshed.

At this point I was some distance behind the party, detained in digging a root from the hard soil. On the north of the *wady* lay a rough hill, strewn with great boulders. Galloping up, I saw two figures with long guns dodging behind the rocks, furtively glancing in my direction, and clearly making to intercept me in the *wady*. A few steps farther, and they caught sight of our party, who fortunately were not very far away. They at once turned and made off to eastward, so sparing me what might have been at least an unpleasant brush with Arabs in search of plunder. Probably they were of the company at whose tents we met such kindness. The man who will lay down his life to protect you when you have passed under his roof may think you "fair game" if he finds you in the open.

This *wady* we passed early in the day, and thereafter we saw neither stream, fountain, nor cistern through all the long burning hours. Coming to what looked like an old burying-ground in the middle of the plain, we halted for lunch, and waited for the muleteers. Two hours passed before the "baggage train" appeared, from which we judged that they had lost their way. Anxiety on their behalf could not blind us to the almost certain futility of any search. Our decision to wait in the somewhat conspicuous position we occupied and give them a chance to find

us was amply justified by the result. With hands and face protected from the sun as best might be, we stretched ourselves on the earth, and perhaps all indulged in the luxury of "forty winks." As time wore on, some sought entertainment in trials of strength, agility, and skill—this last by shooting balls at a stone set up a hundred yards away. The shot, even with a smooth bore, was not alarmingly difficult; but when the stone toppled over, the Arabs who were with us stood amazed. They might have done as well themselves, but had not dreamed of *Franjies* shooting straight. There is an impression abroad that *Franjies* are on the whole rather helpless people, able perhaps to read and write. But these are despicable attainments, save, indeed, when the former may guide to the discovery of hid treasure!

Our baggage-men had wandered, much against their own will and judgment, yielding to the headstrong ignorance of the man told off to guide them. When his incompetence was plainly manifest, with contemptuous anger they dismissed him, some bidding him hold by his mother until he could walk alone, and others suggesting that perhaps his wife needed him about the house. Then trusting their own instinct, which, in these "sons of the highway" approaches genius, they proceeded to find the road for themselves. The long delay, however, destroyed all hope of seeing *Jerash* that night.

Soon after starting again we were joined by a bright, talkative youth, who told us he was at work among the *Beduw*. He knew the various tribes and

their locations, and was familiar with most of the country. He came from *el-Judeideh*, the summer station of the Sidon American Mission, which overlooks *Merj A'yûn*, the ancient "Ijon," from the northwest. This village supplies many of the brave, light-hearted fellows who drive their hardy beasts with the necessaries of life through all parts of the land. Most *mukaries* ("muleteers") have a wholesome dread of the Lower Jordan Valley, but the men of *el-Judeideh* may be seen there almost any day, swinging along with careless ease, as much at home as on the slope of their native mountain. This youth was accustomed to visit these parts every spring, acting as *Kâtib* ("Secretary") among the *Bedawy* chiefs, at the time of division and arrangement of flocks. He assisted at bargains, wrote out contracts, registered numbers, etc.; for these barbarous *sheyûkh*, while holding it *infra dig.* for an Arab to write, quite realise the value of "black and white" in a bargain. He busied himself for some months, passing from tribe to tribe, and with advancing summer turned again to his upland home. He assured us that *Jerash* could not be reached that night, and urged us to turn aside with him to a great *Bedawy* encampment, where we should find heartiest welcome and plentiful entertainment. We lived to regret our refusal; and, after all, we must have slept within an hour of the spot he indicated—probably with a smaller branch of the same tribe. Our guide vowed that water would be found on the edge of the plain, so we judged it best to push on straight towards our goal. The lad bade



us gaily farewell, put spurs to his steed, and galloped away towards a black patch at the base of the hills to westward, where no doubt stood the Arabs' "houses of hair." A curl of smoke over an apparently ruinous village away to the north-west was due, our guide said, to the presence of Circassians, a number of whom had recently taken possession and were attempting to cultivate the surrounding soil. If any men could succeed, they should have a good chance. We shall meet them again at *Jerash*.

Amid a confused heap of hewn stones by the wayside we found a broken column with a few fragments of Greek letters. It had served as a milestone in ancient days, but could no longer yield information as to the way. Nothing else arrested attention till we neared the edge of the waste; then we were drawn to the left by a strip of green and the music of many frogs—both indicating the presence of water. Water we found, indeed, but so little of it and so vile, that not even the thirsty animals would touch it. We came upon two huge reservoirs, with never a drop in either. They stand one above the other in the side of a gentle slope, carefully cemented, sides and bottom, a flight of stone steps leading down into each. From certain marks around, we thought they might have belonged to a system of baths. On the hill above the reservoirs stands an old fortress, *Kal'at Esdein*. Still well preserved, all save the roof, which is gone, is a building to the east, which may have been a church. A large cistern within the court raised our hopes, only to dash them again. It was quite empty. The

fortress must have been of considerable strength, built, as it is, round the top of a little hill, commanding the pass by which we entered the country of *'Ajlûn.*

We were tempted to halt here for the night, contenting ourselves with dry fare, but the sight of our thirsty animals panting beside us, their great eyes seeming to plead with us for water, moved our compassions, so we set forward once more, although the sun was already low in the west, and darkness comes without warning in these lands. Some of us went in advance, hoping to find some *wady* where little pools might still be left, or a spring under some green wooded hill. Separating, we searched the country on either side of the pass, taking what bearings were possible, so that we might not lose the caravan, which wound along painfully below. Hill after hill was scaled and valley after valley traversed, with ever the same result. The shadows were falling thick when at last we struck a wall-beaten track, which we knew must lead to an Arab camp. The rest of our party we saw on a hilltop behind us. The *mukaries* with the baggage were a long way back. With no one to guide them, they were sure to wander in the night that gathered over us, the darkness deepened by great black clouds, that soon covered all the sky. As the cook rode a powerful mare, it was hinted that he might return and guide them past certain tempting openings. The poor man almost shivered himself out of his saddle, a picture of abject terror. There was nothing else for it, so I pushed forward my weary

horse, marking the hilltops against the sky. Some distance along the valley I heard the music of the bells that hung tinkling round the necks of the baggage animals, and guided by this, by and by came upon the *mukaries*, moving cautiously for fear of ruts or holes in which the mules might stumble. There was room enough for anxiety, but no trace of it was seen in these fearless, happy-spirited children of the mountain—no anxiety save what was excited by the condition of a comrade who had fallen sick by the way. The kindness shown to the sick youth, by these strong-limbed but tender-hearted men, was most touching. They had an extra animal, which they rode by turns, to rest their feet a little during the journey. This day and succeeding days every man of them cheerfully gave up his "turn," that their fevered companion might ride all the way. It is hardly doing them justice to say that they gave it up cheerfully: they never seemed to think of it at all. Just as they came forward it was found that the sick lad, in his weakness and weariness, had let something fall a good way back. The big-hearted fellow who had been walking beside him gave the others certain charges concerning him, and without even a look of reproach, dived away into the shadows to search for it. Giving the advancing party instructions as to the way, I stood to act as a landmark, to guide the gallant *Mousa* on his return. The *Bludân* men, reared in the bracing air of *Anti-Libanus*, are among the finest specimens of the Syrian people. Independent, manly, yet withal respectful, ever showing to advantage in

difficulty or danger, their tender solicitude for their unfortunate comrade did more to win our hearts than all their more showy qualities.

Standing alone in the bottom of that thickly wooded vale, distant objects already faded from sight, the hilltops themselves hardly distinguishable against a sky that grew ever darker, flocks of vultures fighting for places in the branches of trees near by, apparently unused to fear in that solitude, I was not sorry to hear, at last, the footfall of the returning *Mousa*. As we started forward together, a bright flame leapt from the top of the highest hill before us. In the red glare we could almost see the figures of our friends as they piled on the fuel. The idea of the fire was excellent. The cook made the suggestion, and fell to work with frantic energy, tearing up roots, pulling down branches and heaping them up to burn, as if he hoped the flame might scorch the reproach of cowardice from his accusing conscience.

Guided by the fire, we soon rejoined our companions on the hilltop. The doctor, meantime, had found an Arab encampment, and returned to lead us thither. His cheery voice rang out of the darkness, calling us to follow him. It was only the voice we could follow, as we never saw each other again until we gathered in the ruddy light of the *Bedawy* fires. We came long after sunset, committing thus unwillingly a breach of desert etiquette. But the Arabs easily understood our plight, and soon great draughts of delicious warm milk were provided. There is no better restorative than this, after a fatiguing and



anxious day. But our excitements were not over yet. Great drops of rain slid down through the darkness, as if the clouds perspired supporting their own weight. Warning drops they were: we rushed up our tent before the shower came which they heralded. Under its roof we all took refuge until the *mukaries* had pitched a second tent; then we separated for the night, to make the best of circumstances—sleeping on chairs, or stretched on the canvas of our camp-beds, covered with anything that came to hand.

Silence as of death had fallen over the mountains; not a leaf stirred in the trees around us; sheep and oxen huddled closely together beside the hair houses of their masters; and the clouds hung dark and threatening, like birds of evil omen poised in the sky above us. The darkness overhead was cloven as by a flaming scimitar, and out rushed a stream of living fire, that spread for a moment over the hills like a curtain of gleaming light, to which every particular leaf responded with individual glitter. The thunder roared and bellowed through all that empty land, like the mingling of the tornado with the voice of many waters. The earth shook as if the very hills were being hurled headlong in divine displeasure. The rain fell in torrents, and beating on the taut canvas of our tents, served to increase the uproar. It is impossible to exaggerate the grandeur of the scene. Not till then could I fully appreciate the majestic realism of the famous old song of the thunderstorm, Psalm xxix. Surely it was after witnessing a storm like this that

the Psalmist penned these marvellous descriptive verses:

> The voice of the Lord is upon the waters:
> The God of glory thundereth,
> Even the Lord upon many waters.
> The voice of the Lord is powerful;
> The voice of the Lord is full of majesty.
> The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars;
> Yea, the voice of the Lord breaketh in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.
> He maketh them also to skip like a calf;
> Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild-ox.
> The voice of the Lord cleaveth the flames of fire.
> The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness;
> The Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh.
> The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve,
> And strippeth the forests bare.—PSALM xxix. 3-9.

As one reads, all seems to pass before him again in unparalleled grandeur. In the midst of a scene like this, how completely one is cast back upon the Lord Himself.

Once we could distinguish no interval between flash and crash, and one of our company experienced a strange thrill passing through his body. Mercifully we were preserved from serious injury. Sitting there among the mountains, the worthy theatre of that awful display, the poor *Beduw* near us crouching in abject fear beside their trembling flocks, one could realise the comfort of the reflection with which the poet concludes his song:

> The Lord sitteth as King for ever.
> The Lord will give strength unto His people;
> The Lord will bless His people with peace.

CHAPTER X

Morning on the mountains—Arab time—Tents and encampments—The Women and their work—Arab wealth—Scenes at the wells—Dogs —Arabian hospitality—Desert pests—Strange code of honour—The blood feud—Judgment of the elders—Arab and horse—The Arabs and religion—The Oriental mind—Arab visit to Damascus.

THE storm continued all night, abating slightly towards midnight, but increasing in violence as the *fajr*, or first glint of morning, stole into the sky. A brilliant flash, followed instantly by a terrific crash, marked the climax just as day broke. The dust, which had blown thick around us on our approach, was transformed into soft, clinging mud. The tents were so wet that packing was out of the question. The hoofs of the animals sank deep into the yielding soil. Travel under these conditions would be both slow and painful. We were fain to wait and see what the sun would do for us. He soon rose in all his strength, and in two hours worked wonders. As tents and roads grew dry, we became more cheerful. The Arabs gathered in little groups, submitting their ills to the doctor's skill, giving what information they could about our way, the country, and themselves. *Jerash*, we learned, was only two or three hours distant. Not that the Arabs knew anything of our

method of measuring time. One said, "What do we know about 'hours'? But see: If the sun is *there* when you leave here, it will be *there* when you reach *Jerash*"—pointing the two quarters of the sky as he spoke.

The sun is the great time-keeper in the desert. By his pace all journeys are measured. The three great points from which the Arabs reckon are sunrise, noon, and sunset—*Shurûk esh-shems*, *Zahr*, and *Mughrab*. When travelling, they like to be off before sunrise; and no one is willingly abroad after sunset. They strive to reach some friendly roof before the last beams of departing day have fled. It is contrary to the etiquette of the *Khâla* ("empty waste") for a guest to throw himself upon his host after sunset. The evening meal, the chief meal of the day, is eaten then. To arrive after it is prepared, or finished, is to put the host to all the trouble of fresh preparation. This no Arab would do if he could possibly avoid it. If the guest is of any consideration, the host would grieve most of all that he was deprived of the privilege of making a proper feast. Therefore, by common consent it is said, "The guest who arrives after sunset goes supperless to sleep." There is, however, another reason for shunning the shadows of early night. Then especially the robber pests of the wilds ply their dark craft, with the long hours till morning in which to flee. With such a start before his crime is discovered, and knowing as he does the intricacies of the desert, the robber or murderer is almost sure to escape.

The Arab "houses," as they call them, are made of goats'-hair, spun and woven by the women into long strips, about fifteen inches wide. The weft is stretched on a frame; the woof is worked in by the women's fingers, and drawn up tightly with what looks like a huge, short-toothed, wooden comb. Dark brown and white are the colours mostly employed. These strips are sewn together with hair thread, into pieces of sufficient breadth. Two poles are set up at each end of the space to be covered. Over these the roof-cloth is stretched by means of cords fastened to the ends, and attached to pins firmly fixed in the ground. As many poles as are needed to support the roof are introduced in the body of the "house," and over these, by side cords, tied as at the ends, to pegs in the ground, the cloth is drawn taut. Often sufficient cloth is made for only one end and one side of the "house." This is fastened under the eaves, and is moved round with the sun, so as to afford shade all day. This haircloth, once thoroughly wet, draws so tightly together as to be perfectly waterproof. Many think its rain-resisting qualities are improved by the smoke of greenwood fires. It is the business of the women (*el-harim*) to put up the "house"; and among them it is reckoned a high accomplishment to be able, with a single blow of the wooden mallet, to drive the tent peg home. Jael the Kenite brought a practised hand to drive the tent peg through the brow of the sleeping Sisera.

The tent is divided by a hair curtain drawn across

the middle. One end is the women's, or more private family department, into which strangers do not intrude. Here are kept the household stores, coffee, rice, tobacco, *samn*, etc. Here also will generally be found the small box, strongly bound with brass or iron, containing contracts, which probably the owner cannot read, and any treasures to which more than usual value is attached. A chief's son on one occasion produced, and displayed with no little pride, decorations which his ancestors had received from European governments for services rendered in troublous times. The other end of the tent is public, where all gather on equal terms. Here the guest is received and made to recline on cushions, which may be covered with silk if the "master of the house" is a man of substance. A shallow hole at one side is the "fireplace," where coffee is prepared for the company. Sometimes a large stone shields the fire from the wind.

The tents of an encampment are set end to end, with about the space of a "house" between them. There may be but a single row, as in the case of those with whom we had spent the night; but if the number is large there may be two rows, forming a kind of street. The place of honour is at the right hand as one enters the encampment; and at either end this position is occupied by one of sheikhly rank. The status of the householder may usually be inferred from the size of his house; and this is reckoned by the number of poles necessary to sustain it. The chief's tent in the larger tribes provides accommodation for many guests.



ARAB WOMEN AND CHILDREN

[illegible]

To the women fall all work and drudgery about camp. We have seen that they make and pitch the tents. They are the water-carriers, and many a weary tramp they have, returning exhausted, with the sweating *girbies* on their backs. If the fountain or cistern is very far off, they may have donkeys on which to bring the precious liquid, in "bottles" of partially tanned goat-skins. They, of course, do the cooking, and must hold themselves in readiness at every moment to obey their lords' behests. When the tribe moves on, they must pack all the goods, strike the tents, and put everything in place, ready for the camels to carry. Their lazy masters, meantime, are lounging in whatever shade there may be, changing their position as the sun moves, "drinking"—*i.e. smoking*—tobacco, indulging in coffee with the sheikh, or yawning over some tale told for the hundredth time. But when a *ghazzu*, or "raid," is projected, then all is stir and excitement among them. Each man girds on his weapons, mounts his riding-camel, and eagerly pushes forward in search of plunder.

The degradation of the women is completed by the practice of polygamy and the freedom of divorce. The husband may in a moment of displeasure simply utter the formula of divorce, and his wife ceases absolutely to belong to him. No particular disgrace attaches to the divorced wife, who easily finds a place in the *harîm* of another. But the husband whose wife has run away from him smarts for long under the indignity. The mother of daughters is despised; but she who bears many sons is held in reverence, as one

who has contributed to the honour of the family, to the strength and dignity of the tribe.

The wealth of the *Beduw* consists, like that of Abraham and the patriarchs, in flocks and herds. The true representatives, indeed, of Abraham, that grand old sheikh, are not to be sought among the pale-faced slaves of Talmud and Rabbi, huddled together in the close, unhealthy towns of Western Palestine ; but in the dark-skinned, free-spirited children of the desert. They roam over wide tracts, wherever vegetation is found, and water to allay thirst, that haunts the wilderness like the shadow of death. The humbler men and youths take charge of the flocks, "leading them forth" to pastures, alas, not often green ; and conducting them every second or third day to the watering. Here one may see any day a reproduction, true even to minor details, of the strife between the herdsmen of Isaac and Abimelech. To the stranger's eye the confusion of flocks at the watering is complete. In reality there is mingling, but no confusion. When the shepherd sees that his charges are satisfied, he simply steps apart and makes his own peculiar cry, when they at once leave the throng and follow him, for "they know his voice." A stranger they will not follow although he copy their shepherd's call never so skilfully, for "they know not the voice of strangers."

The scenes at desert wells are not always so peaceful. Mr. Doughty tells a gruesome tale of a band of wild outriders from the *Yemen* quarter who, after a long hot ride, reached a little pool. The first man sprang forward, and filling a vessel, put it to his

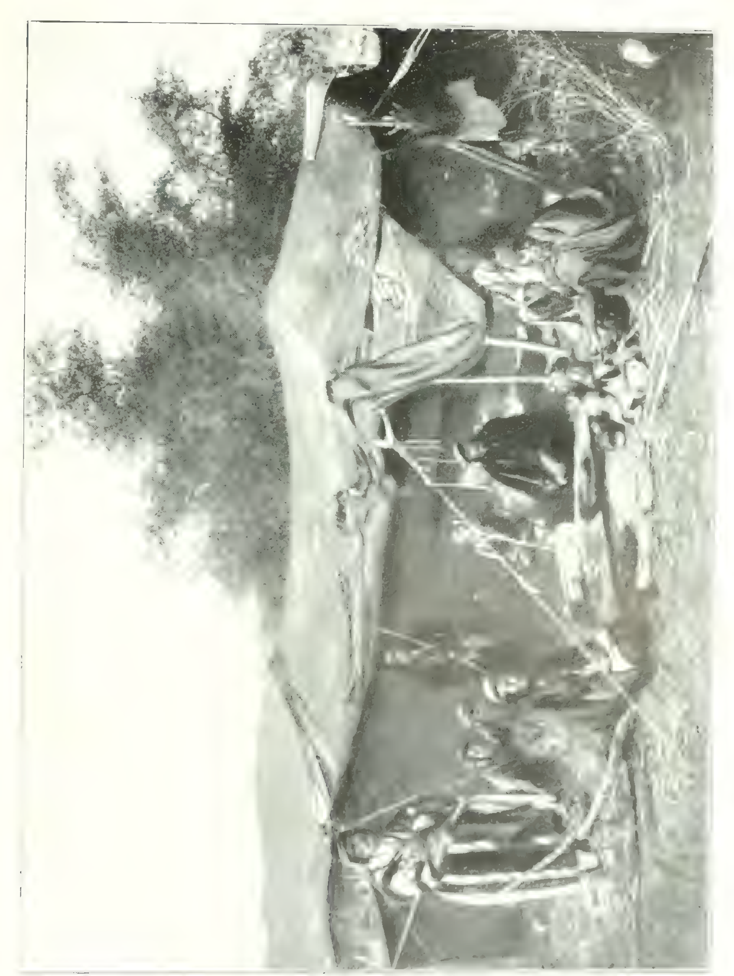
lips. He never drank. The second man, with an awful oath, plunged his sword in his fellow's heart, seized the vessel, and raised it to drink, when he also fell, bleeding to death under a sword-cut from the man who followed him, and who in a similar frenzy of thirst would not wait until his comrade drank. Then the leader of the band exercised his authority. The fierce fellows were placed in a row, and water was handed to them in turn. What a man of iron that commander must have been.

To every camp is attached a number of dogs, that belong in a general way to the community. They are ferocious brutes, and it is by no means safe for a stranger to approach them alone. They seem to be asleep most of the day, and awake most of the night. They are trusty guardians of the flocks during the dark hours, from beasts of prey, their voices of challenge giving the herdsmen due warning of their enemies' approach.

Among the nobler sort these "houses of hair" are the very homes of open-hearted hospitality. In speaking of the Druzes we saw that the practice of hospitality was associated with religious ideas long prevalent in Arabia. The particular idea seems to be more clearly recognised by the *Bedu*. When, in the slant beams of dying day, the weary traveller draws near, the *Bedawy* sees in him a guest sent by God, and so he is called *Daif Ullah* "guest of God," who for sake of God must be bountifully dealt with. For, are not all men "guests of God," spending the brief hours of life's fleeting day under the blue canopy

of His great tent, sharing together His hospitality? With such an one the *Bedawy* will cheerfully share the last food in his possession. For, did not God give the food? and did not He send the guest? His bounty will not fail in what is needful for the morrow. How might two guests sit together in the great Host's tent, one eating and the other hungry? Hence we have the Arabian proverbs: "Loaf for loaf, and your neighbour dies not of hunger"; and "He who has bread is debtor to him who has none." Thus do we find in the nobler phases of desert life a fine reflection of the Christian principle, so well realised by the Apostle Paul, who felt himself *debtor* to every one who knew not the light and joy of the Gospel as he did. The bread of life must be received and dispensed in the generous spirit of Oriental hospitality.

It is curious that the Arab should feel himself relieved from all obligation if he meet the stranger in the open; while if the latter can but touch the most distant peg or cord of the tent, he is absolutely safe. To provide for the security of his guest is a point of highest honour with the Arab; and his comfort is considered before anything else. He is made "master of the house" while he stays. The owner will not sit down unless the guest invites him; nor will he eat until the guest is satisfied. To eat under the same roof, or from the same dish, constitutes a bond of brotherhood. The host is responsible for the safety of his guest, as far as his authority or ability extends: the guest is bound in every way to consider the honour and credit of his host. The



protection of the stranger may even anticipate his arrival at the tent. If in peril, he may take shelter under the name of some powerful sheikh. When he utters this name, it becomes the duty of all to assist him in reaching his protector's dwelling. Any injury done to him is an outrage upon the man, who, thus invoked, becomes his patron and avenger. So in the name of the Lord are deliverance and safety found (Prov. xviii. 10, etc.). The guest may claim entertainment for three days and three nights. The host may require him to stay so long. If he stay beyond this period, the stranger may have to do some work—a provision, probably, against idlers and hangers-on. The guest may abide continually in the "house" of his host only by becoming identified with the family through marriage or adoption (Psalm xxiii. 6).

The guest is expected to show appreciation of the viands supplied in ways not open to one in polite society. In drinking coffee, for example, he should noisily draw it in with his breath, smack his lips, and declare its excellence. But he must offer no payment for his entertainment. This would be regarded as insult. The Arab eats not in the morning; the guest departs with a simple "good-bye." He has had no more than his right; presently his host will enjoy the like kindness at his own or some other brother's hand. The recognition of this obligation to the needy stranger must often have been the very condition of life to wanderers in waste lands.

A fuller discussion of many interesting usages connected with hospitality will be found in the

writer's article "Hospitality," in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. ii. pp. 427 *f.*

Save among the pests that lurk in solitary places, ready to spring upon the lonely traveller unawares, to whom no life is sacred that stands between them and plunder, who seem to find a diabolical pleasure in the mere sight of blood, one need not greatly fear for his life in any encounter with the *Beduw.* They may take all he possesses, and even his clothes, wounding him if necessary to this end; but they do not willingly take life, leaving the disposal of this to Him who gave it.

Like the "bruisers" at home, the Arabs have a code of honour in regard to hostile encounters; but it refers not to the manner of the blow and the part where it falls. It has to do with the weapon. To strike a man with the fist, or with a blunt instrument of any kind, is to put a heavy insult upon him. On the other hand, to strike with a sharp weapon, or smite with the edge of the sword, may be criminal, but it involves no disgrace.

As between man and man, and tribe and tribe, the *lex talionis* is in full force. The tribe is not regarded as an aggregate, but as an organic unity, of which each man is a member, as the hand is of the body. If the hand do one an injury, satisfaction is found in punishment through the foot or any other member. Even so, if a tribesman inflict an injury on one of a neighbouring tribe, and the particular offender eludes the avenger, any member of his tribe may be taken in his place. Injury for injury, blood

for blood, is the stern law. The offender's tribe may confess that wrong has been done, and offer to compound with the injured for a sum of money. The amount in such cases is fixed in solemn conclave by delegates of the different tribes, and the value is represented by a number of camels or other animals. If these are accepted, the feud is at an end. But among the aristocracy of the *Beduw*, the nobler sort, such compounding for blood is esteemed dishonourable. Then the whole tribe, and the wider circle of those with whom they claim relationship, become a staunch confederacy for defence of the manslayer, and for mutual protection against the enemy. Thus the absence of "cities of refuge" is made good to the fugitive; the usages of hospitality come in to relieve the gloom of dark, relentless passion. For the manslayer, if he can but penetrate the tent and eat bread there, may claim sanctuary from the "avenger of blood" himself. Even the father, who thirsts to avenge the blood of a beloved son, will let him depart, and neither pursue nor permit him to be pursued until the space of two days and a night has passed.

The *sheyûkh*—"the chiefs" who administer justice among the *Beduw*—are renowned for their integrity and for the equity of their decisions. They scorn bribes. Stories are often told of the disputes of townsmen who, rather than appear before the corrupt courts of the land, where each must lose whoever wins, have submitted their case to arbitration by *sheyûkh el-Beduw*, in whose judgment both parties at once acquiesced. In cases where blows have been

given, no progress can be made until a balance of injuries has been struck. Only when the least injured has suffered in person or in goods so as to equalise the injuries will the case be heard and adjudicated upon. The deliverance of the *sheyûkh* carries with it the moral weight of the whole tribe. He who disregards it practically passes on himself sentence of outlawry.

The devotion of the Arab to his steed has been sung in many tongues and in many lands. His mare is the first care of the *Bedawy*; more to him than either wife or child, save perhaps his firstborn son, when green food is scarce, and at evening the camels are brought to be milked, the mare first drinks from the foaming vessel; wives and children share what she leaves. On his robber raids he rides out upon his camel, the mare being led, saddled and ready, by his side. In the hour of peril he will commit himself to her fleet limbs; and not once nor twice in the course of his roving life the Arab will owe safety and all else to the speed of his four-footed friend. Tenderly cared for at other times, her every want anticipated, when the moment of trial comes she will fly off like the wind; and the distances often covered ere fatigue stays her career would seem fabulous in European ears. The fondness of the Arab for the horse frequently becomes a craze, leading him into the ridiculous. If a man is too poor to own a horse, *e.g.*, he will take a bone of the noble animal and preserve it in his tent! Again, a horse may be the property not of one or two, but of many. It is



considered as consisting of so many parts, which are bought by different parties. Each is thus entitled to say, with an approach to truth, that he owns horse-flesh. The owner of a good horse never willingly parts with it. If pressed by necessity, he may allow another to become part proprietor. Even then he will hardly sell outright. The man who has the *rasan* ("halter") feeds the horse, and in return enjoys the use of it. Thus it was with a beautiful mare, half of which, with the *rasan*, was owned by the present writer. The other partners were a native Christian gentleman, a rich Moslem merchant in Acre, and the pasha of the province.

We have referred to the religious connection of certain Arab customs. From this it might be inferred that they are a religious people. This is strictly true. Nominally they are Moslems; but their religious knowledge is scanty at best, and their thinking far from clear.

They believe in the existence of God; they are taught to consider themselves His special favourites. All non-Moslems are regarded as His enemies and theirs. But of the moral character of God they have hardly the glimmering of an idea. They will "thank God" as heartily for success in a robber-raid as for recovery from sickness. One must know something of the character of God before he can understand what *sin* is, and why God abhors it. But the *Allah* of the Moslem, capricious in his choice of favourites, is very indulgent towards the frailties and failings of those who confess him and his prophet.

It is futile to seek to identify *Allah* with the God of Christianity. His name is for ever on the lips of his devotees. The most trivial expressions they confirm by appeal to Deity, and that with equal glibness whether they be true or false. Some isolated articles of faith they have, and certain rites, such as circumcision, which are religious in their origin, but they have nothing which can properly be called a religious system. The mind of the Orient, indeed, while singularly fruitful in ideas, is deficient in the elements essential to the thinking of ideas together. It is mystical, reflective, analytic, but it lacks the power of synthesis. There are no great Arabic philosophers, in our meaning of the term. Their "philosophers" are gifted men, whose wit flashes forth in sparkling epigram, in wise discriminations and sage counsels for the conduct of life. For systematic treatment of the problems of being and well-being we search among them in vain. Even what by courtesy we call the "system" of *Islâm* is not an organic unity, but rather an aggregation of ideas around the great central dogma. For the hints as to systematic treatment of the revelation in Jesus Christ found in the Epistles of St. Paul—for even here there is hardly anything beyond hints—we are indebted not to his Hebrew training, but to his Gentile learning, and especially to his acquaintance with Roman Law. While the Oriental mind has been prolific in originating thought, the great task of synthesis has been given specially to the mind of the West.

Give to a rude, untutored people the simple idea

of the unity of God, without any conception of His moral character, together with the further idea that they are His peculiar favourites, and you have prepared the way for a descent not to be thought of without a shudder. If, after long generations, we find this people one "whose heart is not right with God," "whose mouth is full of cursing and deceit," our wonder may be, not so much that they are fallen so low, as that they have preserved their nobler institutions and maintained themselves as well as they have done against the tides of corruption. And there are signs of a yearning among them for better things. Let one authentic story suffice.

External influences affecting the *Beduw* are few and slight. Peddling Jews from Damascus, Safed, Tiberias, Jerusalem perambulate their country by times; but their trade is almost entirely confined to the barbarous ornaments worn by the women. The Moslem pilgrimage which yearly passes through their territory is doubtless a power for evil, fortunately limited in its effects to the districts more immediately adjoining the great *Hajj* road. Once in a while, however, some of the men may journey to *esh-Shâm* (Damascus), city of wonder and beauty to their uncultured minds, returning with strange tales as to its greatness, and confused ideas of its streets, orchards, and musical waters. One such had visited this "earthly paradise," the Arab's dream of splendour and pleasure. He, however, was most of all impressed with what he saw of worship in the great mosque. The effect upon his own spirit was deep,

and this he conveyed to his fellows in the solitudes when he returned. It stirred the slumbering necessity in all their hearts for communion with God. At sunset he drew them up upon the sand, and, standing before them, he imitated as well as he could the movements of the worshippers he had seen, and in these he was followed by his friends. *Ya Allah!* he said, *mitl ma bikûlu fî esh-Shâm*; and his fellows responded in turn, *Wa azwad, wa azwad, wa azwad.* "O Allah! just as they say in Damascus." "And more, and more, and more"! The tale may seem ludicrous, if not absurd; but it has also a pathetic aspect. Does it not seem like a cry from the hearts of men in darkness, yearning for light on the God-ward road? Are we not *debtors* to such as they?



JERASH, GATEWAY

CHAPTER XI

Ride to *Jerash*—Magnificent ruins—Circassian colonists—History—Preservation of buildings—East of Jordan—*Sûf*—A moonlight scene—Down to the Jabbok.

OUR *Bozrah* guide was first in the saddle, and, starting out along the valley, he led the way towards *Jerash*; from this point, however, his office was a sinecure, the road being well marked. We followed the winding path through wooded vale and over wooded hill until we reached a height overlooking rich, cultivated flats, to which we descended by a rocky track, leaving for a time the woodland behind us. Here we found a road on which some labour had been expended, passing between fields partly surrounded by stone walls.

Going forward, we met a cart of antique shape, drawn by a team of oxen, guided by a sturdy Circassian, who was seated in front. The cart was long, narrow, and deep; the axles were wide, and the wheels low. It resembled those still to be seen in many country districts on the continent of Europe. The type may have been introduced into this country by the German colonists. These carts are the only wheeled vehicles used as yet by agriculturists in Pales-

tine, of whom, next to the Germans, the Circassians are perhaps the most successful. We spoke to the driver, but received for reply only a bow, and sundry gestures by which he manifestly sought to make himself agreeable, from which it could also be inferred that he knew no Arabic. Our way led round the left shoulder of a little hill, and down a gentle incline, when, suddenly, almost the whole extent of the ruins on the southern bank of the stream came into view. Men and animals were gladdened by the cheerful sound of flowing water. Just where the road turns sharply to the right towards the ancient city gate, we struck an irrigation channel, full of clear, cool water. After a general scramble for the refreshing liquid, in which riders and horses seemed to mingle indiscriminately, spectacles, etc., being dropped into the stream and duly fished up again, we assumed a more dignified attitude, and prepared to enter the city. On the height to the right were several empty sarcophagi and burial caverns. We traversed the whole length of the city on the northern side of the valley, and pitched our tents under the cliffs just outside the boundary, beyond a copious fountain, over which remains of Greek buildings are still standing. It was yet early afternoon, and most of us were at once drawn forth to see the splendid ruins.

Jerash, or, as it was anciently called, *Gerasa*, stands in *Wady ed-Deir*, on either side of a perennial stream which flows into the Jabbok a few miles to the south, and one of the sources of which is the fountain above

mentioned, at the north-west corner of the city. All the principal buildings of which anything noteworthy remains are on the southern bank of the brook. The ground rises quickly from the bed of the stream, some fifty to a hundred feet, and then slopes gradually backward. Upon this higher part, almost all the magnificence of the old city was gathered. From north-west to south-east runs the famous street, paved throughout, and lined on either side its whole length with fine columns, many of which are standing, capitals and architrave being in parts almost perfect still.

Of *Jerash* we may say generally, it is the best preserved of all the ruined cities east of Jordan. The ruins are weather-worn and beaten with the storms of centuries; earthquakes have shaken down many once splendid buildings, but there were no traces of the destroying hand of man. The Circassians have now supplied this lack. One fears that much of value and interest has already perished under their hammers, as they sought materials to build their houses. This points the urgent necessity to have the ruins thoroughly explored, and measures taken at once to secure what is worth preserving. Passing along the street from the north-west, we first saw a small theatre to the right, now sadly ruined. A little farther forward, on the same side, stands what must have been by far the finest building of all, as it still is the most imposing ruin. This is known as the Temple of the Sun. Situated on an elevated terrace, it is approached by a broad stairway, which leads to the

portico. This consists of three rows of columns of magnificent proportions and artistic workmanship. Originally fourteen in number, the greater part are still in position. Of the principal building, the area is now blocked up with fallen stones. The temple stands in the middle of a court, once surrounded by a colonnade, and measures some eighty feet by seventy. The position commands a fine view of the city. In the near neighbourhood to the south and west are traces of columns, arches, etc., which may have belonged to smaller temples. There are also remains of a church. But all are so buried beneath their own ruins that it is impossible now to speak of them with certainty. On the other side of the road are remains of baths and of a basilica. The pillared street terminates in a circular area surrounded by columns, of which nearly all are standing; many still supporting pieces of the architrave.

Beyond this, on rising ground, close to the ancient city wall, are the ruins of a large theatre and temple. The rows of stone seats in the former are well preserved. The slopes in front are literally heaped with great stones and pieces of colossal columns, while the amount of building underground seems almost equal to what is seen above. The acoustics of these theatres are perfect. Once, with some friends, I made trial of that at Gadara; the lowest articulate sounds were audible throughout the entire building. A little to the east of the temple, a road leads off directly to the south, passing under a triumphal arch, dating, probably, from the time of Trajan. To the



JERASH, TEMPLE OF THE SUN

west of the road, just inside the triumphal arch, lay the Naumachia (for mock sea-fights), without which these cities would seem to have been incomplete. Westward, outside the city wall, are great numbers of sarcophagi. This, apparently, was the chief ancient burying-ground. Nowhere, not even at Gadara where these are numerous, have I seen so many stony receptacles of the dead lying exposed. All have been opened long ago, many of the lids being broken, no doubt, in the feverish search for hidden treasure.

Turning back, we walked the whole length of the street, noting the remains of a *tetrapylon* near the southern end, and of another not far from the northern end, in each case traces of the ruined arches being distinguishable. The ancient gateway to the north is blocked up, but a passage is cut through the great mound of stones which once formed the wall; and along this a considerable volume of water, caught in the higher reaches of the valley and led captive hither, passes, to turn the picturesque old mill below. Above the city, on the southern bank of the stream, are numbers of sarcophagi, many of them adorned with sculptured wreaths, roses, and heads in relief. There are traces of what must have been a large and fine building, with broken columns and sculptured stones. Several mutilated Greek inscriptions are to be seen among the ruins. In the cliffs north-east of the stream, above the spot where our camp was pitched, are several large natural caverns, which do not seem to have been used for any other purpose

than the sheltering of flocks. Beyond the city wall, to the north-east, however, are many sepulchral caves, some of those visited being hewn out of the living rock.

The northern bank of the stream is now occupied by a colony of Circassians, whose neatly-built and plastered houses, each with a walled court in front, contrast most favourably with those of any of the native peasants in Palestinian villages. The houses were built for the most part of ordinary materials, very few of the sculptured stones from the ancient city being employed. This may be accounted for by the fact that few public buildings of any importance stood on this side of the stream. Since then these settlers have gone farther afield, to the peril, as we have seen, of what lends *Jerash* its attractions for us. Entering the town from the north, we find the fountain arched over, from which the main supply of the colony is obtained; beautiful, clear, cool water it is. In the lower ground to the right are vestiges of a temple, around which the colonists have fine gardens. Turning up to the left, for a long distance the city wall is almost intact. Within the wall, to the south-east, are prostrate columns and sculptured stones, marking the site of a building of no little splendour, but whether palace or temple, it is impossible to say.

Outside the wall are scanty remains which may indicate the position of an ancient church. Judging by the magnificence of many of the sarcophagi found here, this may have been the burying-ground of the

greater ones. Just below, by the wayside, at the entrance to the modern village, lies the Circassian graveyard. The graves are of the ordinary Moslem type—little mounds with a protuberance at each end, supposed resting-places for the angels. Here, however, the Circassians seem to expend but little care. The whole place was overgrown with rank grass, nettles, and thistles. The stream which divides ancient from modern *Jerash* is lined with oleanders, whose luxuriant growth in many places quite hides the rippling waters. Just where it passes beyond the boundary of the town it plunges in foamy streaks over a high cliff into a romantic ravine, whence issues the music of a water-mill.

Of the Circassians who now occupy the place, we learned that only some six years before they had come hither. The Turk, finding it hard to control these brave, free-spirited people among their native mountains, has been carrying out gradually the policy of expatriation, adopted wholesale by ancient conquerors in these regions. Removed from the associations of childhood and the inspiring memories that haunt the scenes around them in their highland homes, required to work hard for the mere necessities of life, their rulers hope to make docile subjects out of these once turbulent clans. Colonies are scattered over all Syria and Palestine. One large village is occupied by them on the heights between Tiberias and Tabor. Old *Kuneitera*, in the *Jaulân*, is awakening to new life at their touch. In their agricultural enterprises they are protected by their

reputation for absolute fearlessness, unwavering resolution in avenging an injury, and skill in the handling of their weapons. Roving *Bedawy* and robber peasant alike stand in wholesome dread of their keen blade and unerring bullet. They can thus reckon with certainty on reaping what they have sown, and enjoying the fruits of their labours. They scruple not, therefore, to put hard work into the soil. Gathering the stones from the surface, they form walls along the boundaries of their fields. Their implements, although antiquated, are yet an improvement on those employed by the ordinary fellahîn. The qualities that protect them from thief and robber also secure them in great measure against the unjust exactions of a corrupt Government, and guarantee them entire immunity from outrage at the hands of the soldiery, to which the miserable peasants have so often to submit.

Of the history of *Jerash* but little is known. Josephus places it in the Decapolis, and in his day it must have been a city of some importance. It was one of the chief cities in the Roman province of Arabia. In the days of Bozrah's splendour, *Jerash* must also have been a wealthy commercial centre, Arabian and Egyptian caravans probably passing this way to the north. Baldwin II., in 1121, is said to have marched against *Jerash*, but already in the thirteenth century the city is described as deserted. Why, we cannot tell.

To the west of Jordan there are very few ancient sites where remains of any consequence are to be



JERASH: STREET OF COLUMNS

seen. The few half-buried pillars of Herod's colonnade at Samaria and the ruined synagogue at *Tell Hûm* are about the most important, outside the discoveries made in Jerusalem. The most famous sites are marked only by pottery-strewn heaps, or stretches of shapeless ruins. These are insignificant when compared with the massive walls and stately columns with artistic adornments that meet one everywhere on the east of Jordan. The west, more open to influences from without, has suffered heavily under the many changes it has experienced. Ancient structures were carried off bodily to form new buildings of a more temporary character. These soon perished, the old materials being thus scattered or buried under the debris and dirt. Several causes have contributed to the better preservation of the cities east of Jordan. The land has been much more secluded from foreign influence, and, since the days of the Mohammedan conquest, can hardly be said to have been in contact with the outside world at all. The inhabitants, being chiefly dwellers in tents, have had no occasion to employ ancient materials for the building of houses. The peasants who do occupy stone houses have usually found all the shelter they required in the durable structures of basalt, which are so numerous, ready to their hands. A company, moving to village or town, simply swung back the stone doors, opened the stone shutters, swept out the rooms, and took possession, finding thus much finer houses than they could have constructed for themselves. If they did require to build, the smaller

stones of the ruins around served their purposes admirably, and the remains of the larger buildings, spared through centuries by storm and earthquake, secured immunity from attack.

Sûf, reputed Mizpah, the famous meeting-place of Jacob and Laban, where he fled with his wives, children, and possessions, lies only about an hour to the north-west of *Jerash*. On the occasion of a second visit to the district, I passed through this village. It stands on the south-west lip of the *wady*, which here is of considerable depth. The houses are of the common type, built of white limestone and mud. It is inhabited by Moslems. When I saw it, a large weather-worn, goats'-hair tent was pitched in the middle of the village, where the youth of *Sûf* assembled to learn verses of the *Kor'ân* from the lips of the *Khatîb*—probably the only man in the village who knew how to read and write. The numerous dolmens in the vicinity point back to a very high antiquity.

On the same occasion I enjoyed the exquisite pleasure of seeing the beautiful ruins of *Jerash* under the mellow beams of the moon. It was a sight never to be forgotten. The kindly light, hiding all that was defective, seemed to reveal only what was fair, throwing its delicate splendours over tall column and massive wall, until the ancient city seemed to stand before us in all its ancient magnificence; and one could almost imagine, through the quiet night, the echoing footfall of the Roman guard along the pillared street.

JERASH. GENERAL VIEW

Our road lay through the triumphal arch and down *Wady ed-Deir* to the Jabbok. Just on the point of starting we were treated to another entertainment by our friend the cook. From this point southward he was quite familiar with the country, but he feigned first ignorance and then fear, in order to secure a convoy from *Jerash.* For sake of peace and pleasantness we had almost yielded to his importunity, but the man he brought forward was so exorbitant in his demands, doubtless instructed by the cook, that he received unceremonious dismissal. The road could not be hard to find in any case, so we set out, leaving the knight of the toasting-fork to follow at his leisure. Soon he thought better of it, and took his place again at the head of the procession. In the lower reaches of the valley we saw further evidence of Circassian industry, in the rich crops that waved by the wayside. A short distance east of our route lies a small village, which takes its name from the saint whose tomb stands there—*Neby Hûd,* renowned in ancient Arab story.

We took the more easterly of two possible roads—the longer, but also the easier for the animals. The greater variety and beauty of the scenery repay the extra travel. The descent into the Jabbok valley winds down a narrow ravine, turning sharply round jutting crags, and, in parts, almost precipitous. Oaks and thorns clung to the steeps; luxuriant vegetation covered the ground. The fertile soil of the valley supported a fine crop of wheat. The line of the river could be traced by a winding glory of oleander bloom,

overtopped by tall, gracefully-bending papyrus reeds, whose heavy heads swayed in the breeze. Reaching the "brook," we found the bed more than half dry, but even thus the water took the horses above the saddle-girths. With a short struggle, we all landed safely on the other side. During the winter months this must be a perfectly impassable torrent.

On the farther bank we sat to rest and lunch. The horses too refreshed themselves before facing the steep mountain in front. We gathered bunches of papyrus heads—an operation requiring both care and skill, as we found the undergrowth bound together with trailing brambles, furnished with the sharpest of prickles. Two square towers stand one at each end of the meadow in which we halted. They have not the appearance of great antiquity. There is no entrance to their interior, and their use we were unable to discover.

Climbing the mountains south of the Jabbok, or *Zerka*—"the blue" river, as it is now called—was the hardest work our horses had to face. The track was narrow, and the foothold often extremely precarious, especially over rocky parts where a slip would have meant a fall of hundreds of feet. What a tremendous gorge that Jabbok is! It literally cleaves the country in twain.

Now we were within the borders of the modern province of *el-Belkâ*, of which *es-Salt* is the principal —indeed, the only—city. This lies in the land of the ancient Ammonites. These cool, breezy uplands, beautifully diversified with wooded knoll and pleasant



GORGE OF THE JABBOK

vale, in which may be heard the murmur of flowing water most of the year, offer a rich return to the hand of the enterprising and diligent cultivator. But whence is he to come? Numerous are the flocks and herds that browse on the grassy slopes, find shelter in the shady woods, and drink from the oleander-fringed streams in the vales. But no one who sees it can for a moment suppose that this rich soil is designed simply for the support of sheep and oxen. Those who hope for the return of Israel to the land of their fathers should turn their eyes rather to this rich and empty land than to the more populous and less kindly country west of Jordan.

CHAPTER XII

"Time is money"—*Rumamain*—Priestly hospitality—Fair mountain groves—Es-Salt—The springs—Relation to Arabs—Raisins—Descent to the Jordan—Distant view of Jerusalem—View of the river, the plains of Jordan, the Dead Sea, and the mountains beyond—The bridge—The "publican's" shed—The men from *Kerâk*.

CAUSES for delay are never far to seek among Orientals. "Time is money" is a phrase void of meaning in Arab ears. Money is precisely the thing he lacks most, while of time he has more than abundance. An Eastern in a hurry is one of the rarest sights. We were still on the uplands, far from our destination, when the sun began to throw his evening glories over the western hills. Our cook thought fit to profess that he had lost the way—this doubtless to pay us out for our refusal of a guide. His manner, however, was much too cool and collected, so we were not deceived. But it was annoying, as the whole caravan drew up, to see him comfortably seated among the bushes, on the top of a huge precipice, enjoying a cigarette. We moved rapidly forward, and fortunately found a wandering *Bedawy* who, for a consideration, agreed to conduct us to *es-Salt*. He led us by a steep pathway to the bottom



of a sweet valley. Then suddenly we plunged into a romantic ravine, down which dashed a brawling stream, sprinkling rock and bush with sparkling diamonds. A stiff climb up the farther bank brought us to the little village of *Rumamain*, just as the light departed. Our tents were pitched by candle-light. The villagers, who are Christians, were most cordial in their welcome, and hastened to furnish whatever we required, as far as it was in their power. The priest invited our party to take refreshments with him, and those who could be spared from the camp gladly accepted his hospitality. He well maintained the eastern traditions in the entertainment of strangers, although some of his beverages were stronger than the desert law prescribes!

The village stands on the edge of the gorge through which we had passed. The mountains tower aloft on either side. The valley narrows southward, but to the north it opens out into a broad, fertile expanse, bounded by the mountains, torn with water-courses, which form the southern bank of the gorge of the Jabbok.

Before daybreak we were all astir. Waiting only for a supply of beautiful milk, which was brought us by the Arabs in the mountains, we got to horse again. Our guide shouldered his club and marched off towards the thickets that hung, shaggy and dark, on the sides of the valley. Our path wound among these delightful groves almost to the confines of *es-Salt*. About three hours sufficed to bring us to the city, but the ride was one not soon to be forgotten. It

was one of the most enjoyable parts of our whole journey. Thick oaks and thorns gathered in the bottom of the hollows; honeysuckle, entwining their gnarled limbs, shed perfume on the air; the hillsides were clad with trees of richly varied foliage, while tall pines swayed gracefully high over all. The morning was fresh and beautiful. Even the horses seemed to feel the inspiration of surroundings, and footed it merrily along. It seemed all too soon when we reached the edge of the forest, and looked forth on the treeless hills beyond. Many of these are, however, covered with vineyards, whose sprouting green relieved the dull monotony. Tree-clad they too once were, as we can see from the numerous stumps in the fields. A few of the forest patriarchs, left here and there in the cultivated ground, would have done much to beautify the land, and would have yielded grateful shade to the labourers. But it is difficult to restrain the axe when it is once set in motion. Here we found evidences of genuine industry. Wherever it is possible, vines are planted and carefully tended, so that the face of the country assumes quite a cheerful and prosperous aspect.

The city of *es-Salt*, lying as it does on the steep slope of a valley, is not seen until one is fairly upon it. The name *es-Salt* is evidently derived from *salton hieraticon*—"the sacred forest." The inhabitants may number in all some seven thousand, of whom the great majority are Moslems. With the Christians, however, they continue to dwell together in harmony. There may be about two thousand Christians, taking

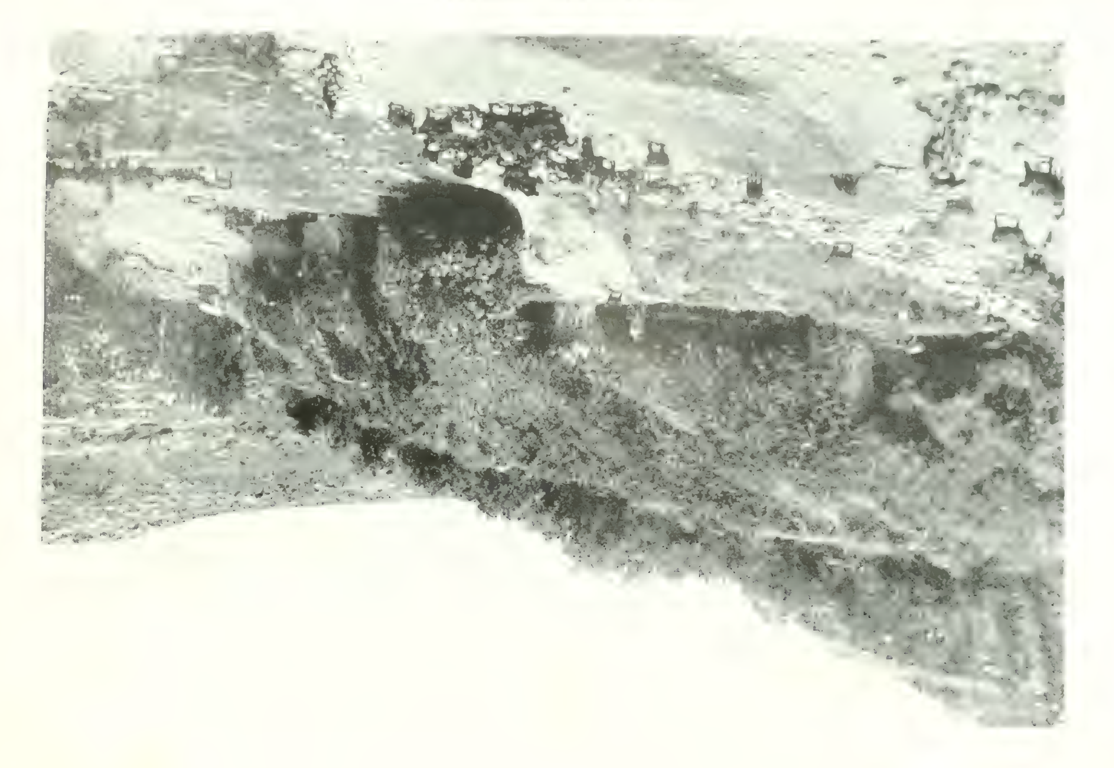
Greeks, Latins, and Protestants all together. The last belong to the church founded by the Church Missionary Society. It was our good fortune to meet with the Syrian clergyman of this congregation, *Kassîs Khalîl Jamal*—a gentleman whose praise is in all the churches. With his counsel, we were persuaded to stay here for the day, instead of pushing straight on to Jordan, as we had originally intended. In the valley under the city are olive groves, where the company, dismounting, sat down for lunch, under shadow of the trees, with the sound of running water in their ears. Our tents we pitched on the top of the hill overlooking the town, separated by a narrow valley from that on which the ruins of the old castle stand.

Having seen all right about the camp, some of us set out, gun in hand, tempted by the numerous partridges, and enjoyed an excellent opportunity to see the surroundings of *es-Salt*. There are few remains of antiquity, and these not of great interest. Traces of old graves, found along the hill-faces, and the bare ruins of the old castle are the chief. The springs, to which the town owes so much of its life, are, of course, highly prized. The town itself is interesting as being the chief mercantile centre in all the district east of Jordan through which we travelled. The market is frequented by the *Bedawe* from far and near, and everything necessary for their poor life is found exposed for sale in the streets. Hither the "housewives" bring their *samn*, *jibn* (clarified butter and cheese), skins, and other products of the wilds,

and carry off in return the cloth of which their scanty clothing is made, coffee, tobacco, etc. *Es-Salt* thus forms an excellent basis from which to reach the Arab tribes in these parts. The advantages it offers are utilised, as far as possible, by the missionaries there, and, with the help of the medical department of the mission, they have found considerable entrance; but, in order to overtake the work in a manner at all satisfactory, men would have to be set apart to devote all their time to evangelising the Arabs. With a well-manned station here and another at *Bozrah*, nearly all, if indeed not all, the tribes that touch the eastern borders of Palestine might be reached; and in due time evangelists from among themselves would go forth with the glad tidings into the inhospitable wastes beyond.

We were assured that the grapes grown in the district are unsuitable for the making of wine. However that may be, wine is not made, but a great business is carried on in raisins, those of *es-Salt* being famed throughout the whole country. The Jewish merchants of Tiberias buy large quantities of them and use them to produce *'arak*—a distilled spirit which is working havoc among the youth of western Palestine, Moslems as well as others falling a prey to its seductive influences, although all use of intoxicants is for them under religious ban.

Our stores were replenished from the market, two days' provision only being required, as in that time we hoped to reach Jerusalem. Early next morning all was packed up and ready for the descent to Jericho.



Several of our party were already in the saddle, when the horse of one who had been assisting the ladies to mount thought fit to bolt, and, in their wild efforts to catch him, the European horsemen may have given the Arabs some new ideas in horsemanship. In any case, we gained a more intimate acquaintance with the nearer surroundings of the city than would have been possible otherwise. When at last the runaway was captured, the main part of our caravan had already disappeared some distance in front; and it may give some idea of the crookedness and irregularity of the road to say that we did not catch a glimpse of them again until we were almost upon them, on reaching the plain to the north of the Dead Sea. It is a descent of over four thousand feet in about fifteen miles. The road turns abruptly now to one hand, now to the other, adapting itself to the possibilities of the rough, rocky surface, plunging into ravines, and anon emerging on grassy tracts; but downward, ever downward, is its course. The wild birds here are evidently little used to be disturbed by man. Even the timid partridge sat quite close, or nimbly ran along the rocks on either side of the path. We had not left *es-Salt* half-an-hour when, from an eminence commanding a wide prospect, we saw the high tower that crowns the Mount of Olives in the far distance, and thus caught the first glimpse of the environs of Jerusalem. This is one of the most tantalising sights. It seems so near, and yet hours of toil in the hot sun seem to bring the traveller no nearer. And when, as the sun sinks, he descends into the valley, and it

is lost to view, it seems as if he had been following some strange kind of "Will o' the wisp." Ere long, too, we obtained a view of the Dead Sea, lying under a blue haze away below us to the left; and soon we could trace the course of Jordan through the sandy plain by the winding breadth of deep green that fills the valley within the valley in which the river is confined.

In that clear, dry atmosphere distances are most deceptive. Seen through the openings in the hills, one would think that on touching the plain we should immediately reach the river, but there are miles of flat, sandy ground to cover ere we pass under the shadow of the embowering foliage and hear the rush of the waters of Jordan. Leaving behind us the mountains of Ammon, which form the eastern boundary of these deep plains, their scarred sides stretching away into the beetling heights that rise darkly over the Salt Sea, the prospect before us was one of enchanting interest. We were already on the borders of the "circle" of Sodom, which charmed the worldly eye and heart of Abraham's nephew, when viewed from yonder mountains to the west, and which was so generously given up by the aged uncle to the youthful Lot. How strikingly these barren plains enforce the lessons of that old-world history! How vain the choice of beauteous pastures, one day ere long to be o'erwhelmed in desert sand! How infinitely wise the choice of Abraham, the portion of whose inheritance was the unchanging God Himself! There, stretching away southward until lost in a blue

JORDAN, SHOWING TERRACES

haze between her guardian mountains, are the waters of the great sea, which still, in name, is associated with the unhappy Lot; for the natives call it only *Bahr Lût*—"the sea of Lot." Before us flowed the river whose tide rolled backward, and over which, while the ark of the covenant stood in the midst, the great "congregation" of Israel crossed dry-shod. Yonder lies the site of Gilgal, whence the conquering hosts went forth under the gallant Joshua. Towards the western border of the plain we saw great patches of green, over which rose a curl of blue smoke, marking the position of *Erîha*, the village which now represents the city of Jericho, whose walls fell down at the shout of the armies of Israel. Beyond rose the dark, frowning crags of *Karantal*, by tradition identified with the wild scenes of our Lord's Temptation.

The Jordan Valley stretched away northward between its mountain walls almost as far as the eye could reach; the high cone of *Karn Sartabeh* rising full two thousand feet above the plain. This last has been by some identified with the great altar raised by the Eastern tribes on their return from the conquest of the West. It is in reality an "altar" of Nature's raising, and is interesting as one of the signal stations from which, by means of great fires, intelligence was flashed over the land when the new moon had been seen in Jerusalem. The wooden bridge by which we crossed the Jordan was entirely concealed by the groves around until we were almost upon it. A substantial structure it looked, made of

strong beams, supported by great posts, all securely fastened together; it seemed as if it would outlive any ordinary flood, and so, doubtless, it would. But the floods of the winter 1890-91 were not ordinary. For some months the rains were excessive. The river rose far above its usual level, submerging large tracts, and carrying off much that was valuable—among the rest the bridge, which had done us and others such good service. The river here is deep and strong, sweeping with great rapidity round its swift curves. The water is of a thick, brown colour, charged with the soil over which it passes. Care must be taken in approaching the treacherous banks of sand and clay. Toll was collected by an enterprising Syrian, who had erected a wooden shed at the Jericho end of the bridge. One or two native huts also stood on the little level, almost surrounded by a bend of the river, and protected to westward by high sand bluffs.

It was already past mid-day when we arrived, and, as the heat was terrible, we were thankful to take refuge in the "publican's" shed. We were received with every token of welcome by the owner, who at once busied himself to provide for our refreshment. We found it an excellent plan to carry with us a supply of tea. It is often easy to get boiling water when it is hard to get other things. Tea is swiftly made, and, on a hot journey, is most refreshing. *Leban*, also, there was in plenty. After our meal, the more weary of the party, stretched in the shade, enjoyed a delightful nap,—only for a little, however;

for this being the chief thoroughfare between east and west of Jordan, quiet could not be secured for long at a time. Shepherds passed over with their flocks, and guided them down to the water's edge to drink. Negotiating with some of the more tractable of these half-wild men, we secured draughts of delicious milk. Then came Arabs from the uplands of Moab; strong, stalwart, sallow-featured men; some armed with the spear, others carrying rifles, with belts stuck full of battered cartridges. They sat down sociably around the shed, and conversed freely. They were greatly impressed with the strength of the men of *Kerâk*, the ancient Kir Moab. The district was not even nominally subject to the Ottoman Government. The spirit of wild independence was abroad among them. While yielding ready obedience to their own *sheyûkh*, they resent and battle to the death against any interference with their tribal liberty. Holding themselves absolute masters of the soil, they consider themselves entitled to levy blackmail on all who pass through their territory. This varies in amount, according to the prudence or the want of it displayed by the traveller. One who goes with tents, a large retinue of servants, and luxurious appointments may have to pay some hundreds of pounds before he escapes their hands; another may shoulder his camera, ride in on a mule, and with a few *rotls* of coffee and a judicious distribution of a few pounds of tobacco and snuff, may march about with freedom, photograph all of interest in the district, and carry

off his work in safety. In these regions one must avoid every appearance of wealth. The Turkish Government claims a supremacy which for long it was unable to assert. Often we heard that the *Hajj* guard, returning from *Mecca*, was to attack and subdue the Kerâkers. The report that there were four thousand trained men, armed with repeating rifles and no lack of ammunition, no doubt restrained the valour of the gallant guard. At length the Turk has established a certain shadowy authority in the town of *Kerâk* itself; but over the Arabs, who occupy the town only a few months in the year, it is difficult, if not impossible, to exercise any effective control.

The stronghold, the thought of attacking which gave cold shivers to the Turkish soldiery, could not daunt the high-hearted soldiers of the Cross. With admirable courage, in the true spirit of Christian heroism, a missionary and his wife braved all the dangers in the way, and made for themselves a home in the midst of these people. That they had dangers not a few to face, and many privations to endure, needs hardly to be said. But these "things did not move them"; and the bold warrior Arab learned to love the man of peace, and prize him as a friend. Who knows whether the Cross may not soon triumph where the crescent so long struggled for supremacy in vain!

CHAPTER XIII

The banks and thickets of the Jordan—Bathing-place—The Greek convent—A night of adventures in the plains of Jericho—The modern village—Ancient fertility—Possible restoration—Elisha's fountain—*Wady Kelt*—The Mountain of Temptation—The path to Zion.

The Jordan, in the lower reaches, is shaded by overhanging willows, and the path along the bank is lined with tall oleanders. In the brushwood, which grows thickly over the little peninsulas formed by the circlings of the river, we were assured that the *nimr* (small leopard) found a lurking-place; and, further, that he and his grim neighbour, the hyena, haunted the bushy hollows between the sand-dunes which stretch away towards the sea.

We shouldered our guns, and, armed with ball cartridge, set out to beat the brushwood in the hope of starting game of this class. Perhaps it was as well for ourselves that we were disappointed; but a gun in a man's hand adds marvellously to his powers of endurance in walking, so we were able to explore the shady banks of the river, and attain a fuller knowledge of its windings. The bridge was photographed with a group in front as a souvenir of our visit; then, sending the muleteers straight to Jericho with tents

and baggage, we prepared to ride towards the sea, with the intention of returning to Jericho for the night. Our road wound among the sand-dunes for some distance. Here we were charged to keep close together. The advice was necessary. Had one lingered behind, and by any mischance lost the way, he might have wandered long enough in the labyrinth formed by these little sand-hills, which resemble each other so closely as to be distinguished only by the trained eye. They are the haunts of robbers too, who, in the multitudinous winding hollows, may easily escape pursuit.

We did not go so far down as the fords and famous bathing-place; but on a subsequent occasion I saw something of the extraordinary scenes enacted there—a great company of Russian pilgrims, men, women, and children, plunging promiscuously into the sacred river. Most wore a thin linen garment as they went down into the water. This is afterwards carefully preserved, and is worn again only as a shroud. Certain men standing in the stream saw that each one went at least three times over the head.

Leaving the labyrinth, we emerged on a wide sterile plain, over which grew only a few stunted desert bushes. Here and there we could see the shimmer of the sunlight on a thin crust of salt. The Greek convent, standing in the midst of the waste, served as a landmark, and thither we directed our course, leaving the winding road. This cross-country riding in these parts has its dangers. The horses are apt to sink through the soft surface, into holes



FORD OF JORDAN. PILGRIMS BATHING.

burrowed by the rodents; and deep ruts, worn by winter torrents, are often difficult to pass. At length we stood before the gate of the convent, and the hospitable monks regaled us with refreshing draughts of pure, cool well-water. It seemed only a short distance farther to the sea; but some of our company were growing fatigued, and, at our rate of riding, it would take almost till sunset to reach our camp by the "City of Palms"; so, reluctantly, we turned our horses' heads northward, comforting ourselves with the hope that in a more convenient season we should stand on the shores of the Dead Sea and plunge in its sullen waters.

On arriving, we found the *mukaries* busy with the tents, which soon were ready for our reception. But we were disturbed somewhat to hear that one of our attendants was missing. He ought to have come with us toward the sea; but when we found he had not come, we concluded that he had accompanied the muleteers to Jericho. Now, however, he was nowhere to be found, and the *mukaries* assured us he had started immediately behind us. The evil reputation of the district made us rather anxious; but the reckless character of the man, and his habit of starting off on the wildest projects without a moment's warning, led us to believe that *Sa'id* would turn up again, as he had often done before. We set up lights, however, on the most conspicuous points, when darkness fell, so as to guide him, if possible, over the plain. As the night advanced, and we still had no news of him, our anxiety increased, our main hope being that,

as he followed us, he had arrived late at the convent and taken shelter for the night, or that haply he had found his way back to the bridge. Even with fifty men it would have been futile to search that wilderness in the dark. A hunt after a number of wild swine that came to the neighbourhood of the camp served only as a temporary diversion from the graver subject occupying our thoughts. The "garrison" of the town consisted of one soldier, whose services we secured without much difficulty. He was despatched, with the breaking light, to go towards Jordan bridge, and southwards to the convent, while some of our party prepared to scour the plain, the rest getting in order for the ascent to Jerusalem.

All were very early astir. Just before mounting, the plain was swept with the telescope, and in the distance a coming horseman was descried, who seemed to resemble the lost man. His appearance caused no little excitement in camp; for, on a nearer view, there was no doubt of his identity. Both man and horse were utterly wearied, and *Sa'id's* garments were covered with blood. The tale he told of his experiences was terrible enough. On our departure, he lingered a moment to see the muleteers ready and on the road; then, as he thought, he followed us, but missing the way, he pushed straight southward, guided in part by the river, arriving on the Dead Sea shore just as the sun set. As he had ridden rapidly, he thought he might have passed us on the way; but, after waiting and careful search along the lonely beach, he despaired of finding us. He turned away in the

twilight, hoping by instinct to hit upon some way leading to Jericho. Soon the night was filled with the horrid howlings of the jackals, all over that weary waste, and here and there the shrill laugh of the hyena fell on his ear. Pushing forward, he was speedily entangled among the sand-dunes. Climbing one after another, he sought to hit upon some landmark to guide him; but ever, on descending, his bearings were lost, and he wandered almost hopelessly. As the night closed in, he could see shadowy forms moving around, and the howlings came nearer and nearer. Suddenly, in the track before him, he saw a hyena glaring upon him. The natives believe that the hyena will not attack a man save when famishing or grievously provoked. But in such moments one does not reflect much on these things.

Fortunately, *Sa'id* had my gun and ball cartridge with him. With nerves steadied by something like despair, he aimed at the brute's head, and, the ball crashing through the brain, he rolled over with a groan. A momentary silence followed the report, and then the dismal noises broke out again. Riding onward he saw, and not a moment too soon, a leopard crouching for a spring. Aiming swiftly, he fired, and the ball took effect in the leopard's neck; but, withal, the brute was able to spring, and almost to reach his mark. "Then," said *Sa'id*, his lip quivering and an unaccustomed tear trembling in his eye—"then I must have had strength given me from heaven; for, as the brute sprang, I reached forward, caught him by the neck, and hurled him back violently to the

ground, where he lay stunned, and a second ball finished him." He attempted to carry the leopard on the pommel of his saddle, and this accounted for the blood-stains on his garments. But weariness and anxiety soon overcame his purpose, and the leopard was left to decay among its native wilds.

Finally, baffled by the darkness and the intracacies of the labyrinthine windings, he climbed a little knoll, and tying the horse's halter to his arm, stretched himself on the ground to sleep; but ever and anon, as the denizens of the desert drew near, the trembling creature tugged at the halter to awaken his master, and seemed to long for waking fellowship. At last he was overcome with sleep, and was only aroused when the horse had apparently come close up and whinnied in his ear. Then, rising bolt upright, it seemed to him as if the gloomy waste were all alive with moving shades, and vocal with dismal howlings. How he came out of that pandemonium he never could say; but erelong the dawn stole into the sky, and the wild beasts crept away into their dens. He found a poor shepherd, walking out with his flocks, who, seeing his forlorn condition, sustained the best traditions of desert hospitality by offering what he had for his day's food to the weary traveller. Then he was able to make out the direction of Jericho, and, before the morning was well born, he was again with his companions, uttering perhaps the most sincere *hamdulillahs* of his life. After hearing this tale from the lips of that worn-out man, on the borders of the desert plain of Jericho, one could better realise



JERICHO. ELISHA'S FOUNTAIN.

what it meant for the Son of Man when, driven of the Spirit into the neighbouring wilderness, through the long nights He was "with the wild beasts."

Poor *Sa'id* has now "joined the majority." He escaped the beasts of the Dead Sea plains to fall a victim to a more subtle and deadly foe. While at work on the new railway near the *Hummeh*, the hot springs in *Wady Yarmuk*, he and many others were mortally stricken with typhoid. A heavy toll in human lives these valleys have exacted on the passage of that road of iron. *Sa'id* was a typical light-hearted Syrian, prone to err, who yet through years of service proved faithful according to his light, with a larger infusion of courage in him than is common among his countrymen. In steadfast loyalty at his master's side, neither fatigue nor peril daunted him.

A burden was lifted from all our minds, and, moving forward that morning, even higher spirits than usual prevailed. We rode into the village, and stopped a little at the hotel, where souvenirs of the Dead Sea plain, staffs made from the oaks of Bashan, *Bedawy* clubs, and such-like articles, are exposed for sale to travellers. Then we rode along lanes bounded by hedges of prickly pear and thorns towards the spring of Elisha, called now *'Ain es-Sultan*—"Fountain of the Sultan," where man and beast drank from the cool stream and were refreshed.

The modern *Erîha* is a miserable representative of the famous cities that rose one after another in the neighbourhood of this copious spring. The land immediately around is a marvel of fertility, bearing,

when under cultivation, with tropical luxuriance. Near by the spring stood the ancient city which was attacked and overthrown by the Israelites—the first stronghold gained on this side of the Jordan. Near the same spot rose the city of Heil, who dared the curse and endured it—the curse pronounced by Joshua—in order to restore the crown of splendour which his ancestors had crushed so ruthlessly. This latter was the city known to Elijah and Elisha, not yet ancient in their time, for the inhabitants of which the waters of this lovely spring were miraculously healed. One of the "schools of the prophets" existed here; and here Elijah had his last interview with the youth, the hope of Israel, ere he went forth to yonder lonely tracts eastward, to be parted from the faithful Elisha by the chariot of fire, and caught away to heaven in the whirlwind. The fertility of the plains of Jericho was almost proverbial in later days, when its rich revenues were farmed by Herod from Cleopatra.

Then the magnificent balsam gardens and the groves of stately palms lent added beauty to a scene in the midst of which the luxury-loving Herod had his winter quarters. In the days of our Saviour the sycamore tree was not wanting, as we learn from the story of Zaccheus. The remains of old sugar-mills testify to the ancient culture of the sugar-cane; and the ruins of ancient aqueducts, dating from high antiquity, which brought the contributions of distant springs to the grounds around the city, show with what care the paradise of Jericho was watered. The

balsam has now utterly disappeared; and the stranger, coming unprepared upon the scene, might well exclaim, "How could Jericho ever be called 'the city of palm trees'?" But great fruitful vines may yet be seen, in the badly-kept gardens, yielding with prodigality in spite of indifferent husbandry; and heavily-laden bananas, bending over the hedges, offer of their sweetness to the hand of the passer-by. The modern village boasts a hotel, a Greek hospice for the accommodation of Russian pilgrims, and the ruins of an old castle, which frown out upon the wilderness to eastward. Those who are willing to be pleasantly deceived by monkish tradition may also have the house of Zaccheus pointed out to them. There are some three hundred inhabitants in the village, creatures of a miserable physique, and with a most undesirable reputation for laziness and thievishness.

That the plains of Jericho might be once again what they were of old—a very garden of delights, wherein is enough and to spare for all—needs hardly to be said. Were proof required, it would be found in the surroundings of Elisha's fountain. Wherever the waters of the fountain come, the desert sands are transformed into fruitful fields, and all its banks are clothed with emerald. No small supply of water would serve to waken life over all the plains; but is not the vast volume of the Jordan only waiting to be caught in the higher reaches, and taught to run in fertilising streams all over the broad lands? For long generations it has flowed idly past, only a few

yards on either side of the rushing flood tasting its refreshing power. What untold wealth is rolling there, in these rich brown waves! What hand shall arrest the flow, and turn its powers to noblest uses, so that all the valley may be filled with the music of rustling grain and with the beauty of ripening fruit? —that the wilderness may rejoice and blossom as the rose. Ere this is possible, the reins of government must be held by stronger and more righteous hands, the husbandman must be secured in the enjoyment of the fruit of his toil. But surely now the appointed season for favour cannot be long delayed. Happy the eyes that shall behold the awaking of all the land to fresh life after its death-like slumber! In those sweet days of reviving, no fairer scenes will greet the eye than these broad stretches, proudly in the midst of which will rise once more the beautiful palm-girt city.

We could have lingered long beside that delightful spring, pouring its sparkling waters forth in blessing over the plain; but the sun rose higher in the heavens, and we had a hard ascent before us. We rode along the base of the overhanging hills, crossed the mouth of *Wady Kelt*, and struck the carriage road leading from Jericho to Jerusalem. Deep, dark, and forbidding is the great cleft in the hills which, since the days of the learned and acute Robinson, has been by many identified with the brook Cherith, where Elijah hid from Jezebel's wrath, and was miraculously supplied with food. The probabilities are, however, that the old Gileadite turned not



southward, but eastward. In the ravines of his own native highlands there must have been many retired spots known to him in youth, where he might foil the most earnest search by strangers. The great grim mountain *Karantal*, whether the scene of Christ's Temptation or not, has yet a Christian history of deep interest. The caverns in his frowning sides have been the haunts of Christian hermits from early days. Even yet, at times, a devotee takes refuge there from the vain world. On Mount Tabor, at a Feast of the Transfiguration, I met an Austrian monk who told me he had spent six years in solitary meditation and prayer in a cave in the Jordan Valley.

Now, as we ascend the winding path along the steep mountain sides, we pause for one last look over the plain and the sea and the dark heights beyond, whence came Israel's hosts of old to possess the land. There, beneath us, where the plain is lost in green, stood the ancient Jericho, where the worshippers from the east of Jordan were wont to assemble ere going up in company to the great feasts. Doubtless these very hills have echoed to the voice of psalms, as the pilgrims marched up the steep ascents. So was it our privilege to turn our faces towards Zion, planting our feet in their footsteps—the footsteps of the tribes of God who went up thither. Very heartily could we wake the echoes again with their old song, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem," as we pressed upward to realise a long-cherished dream in the vision of the Holy City.

Thus may we all press up the steeps of life, Zion's love in our hearts, her songs upon our lips, until with joy the pilgrims' eyes behold, amid the light and splendour of the Eternal City, the face of the great King!

THE END

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